

The background of the cover is a solid dark blue. Overlaid on this is a large, lighter blue, stylized profile of a human face, facing left. The profile is composed of smooth, rounded shapes. Scattered around the face are several five-pointed stars of varying sizes, also in a lighter blue shade. A thin, light blue crescent moon is positioned in the upper right quadrant, partially overlapping the face's head.

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HEGEL AND RESISTANCE

Rebecca Comay and
Bart Zantvoort

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Hegel and Resistance

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Frequently Cited Works

Frequently cited works by Hegel are referenced with the corresponding abbreviation below, followed by the page number in the English translation (except where no English translation is given), or the paragraph number. Works by Hegel cited occasionally, as well as all other references, are referenced in full in the individual chapters.

‘R’ is used to refer to the ‘remarks’ (*Anmerkungen*) in Hegel’s text; ‘A’ is used to refer to the ‘additions’ (*Zusätze*) based on lecture notes.

- EL *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I: Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse 1830. 1. Teil, Wissenschaft der Logik. Werke, vol. 8 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).
- EPN *Philosophy of Nature. Being Part Two of the Encyclopedia of The Philosophical Sciences (1830)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse 1830. 2. Teil, Naturphilosophie. Werke, vol. 9 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).
- EPS *Philosophy of Mind. Being Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).
Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse 1830. 3. Teil, Philosophie des Geistes. Werke, vol. 10 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).
- PH *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* [introduction only], trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte. Werke, vol. 12 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).

- PR *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A.W. Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts. Werke, vol. 7 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).
- PS *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. J. N. Findlay, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
Phänomenologie des Geistes. Werke, vol. 3 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).
- SL *The Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Humanity Books, 1969).
Wissenschaft der Logik I. Werke, vol. 5 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986). *Wissenschaft der Logik II*. Werke, vol. 6 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).
- VPG *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes. Berlin 1827/28* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994).
- VRP III *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818–1831*, vol. 3: *Philosophie des Rechts. Nach der Vorlesungsnachschrift von H.G. Hotho 1822/23*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ilting (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1973–1974).
- VRP IV *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818–1831*, vol. 4: *Philosophie des Rechts. Nach der Vorlesungsnachschrift K.G. v. Griesheims 1824/25*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ilting (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1973–1974).

Introduction

Bart Zantvoort

The history of modern philosophy can be read as a history of resistance to Hegel. For many major post-Hegelian philosophers, Hegel represented philosophy at its worst: a catastrophic relapse from Kant's critical philosophy into metaphysical obscurity, a dangerous ideological affirmation of the historical destiny of the modern state, a megalomaniac delusion regarding the power of mankind, in the form of Spirit, to dominate nature, contingency and otherness. In its unceasing drive to integrate every aspect of reality as well as thought into a closed, coherent and all-encompassing system, Hegel's philosophy provoked the ire of generations of critics from all over the philosophical spectrum: from the founders of the analytical tradition, G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, who sought to save philosophy from the rot of British Idealism, to a whole range of post-metaphysical and anti-totality critiques running from Heidegger to Levinas, Derrida and Deleuze, with all their contemporary offshoots.

As Frank Ruda recently wrote, for his critics, Hegel was too much of everything, falling foul of both sides of most central philosophical controversies. His absolute idealism, which sought to sublate everything into the movement of the absolute concept, eventually inverted into, as Marx had it, a 'crass materialism'.¹ His philosophy espoused a naïve belief in progress, while at the same time thwarting progress by sanctifying the status quo. He sought to forcibly squeeze all phenomena into the corset of the dialectical movement, while undialectically imposing the closure of his own system on dialectics. He was too much of a historicist, subjecting everything to the necessity of historical development, yet also proclaimed the end of history and its culmination in his own system. His philosophy was too 'concrete', indiscriminately drawing everything from natural phenomena to politics, psychology and art into the realm of philosophical speculation, yet at the same time disregarded the empirical by proclaiming it irrelevant in the face of philosophical truth ('Too bad for reality!' as the apocryphal Hegel quote has it).

Yet, the kind of resistance that Hegel has generated and continues to generate – unrelenting, multifarious, almost obsessive in nature – is also indicative of his central place in the development of modern thought and the enduring power of his ideas. This resistance is never a simple rejection, but a continuing need to engage with an annoying force of opposition that refuses to go away. Foucault famously described the difficulty of extricating oneself from Hegel as follows:

To truly escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes that we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge, in that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.²

Hegel is the itch that keeps nagging contemporary philosophy, and the various ways of dealing with this itch have done nothing to relieve the pain. The so-called Hegel revival of recent decades has sprouted a variety of new interpretations seeking to adapt Hegel's thought to this or that philosophical end, which may give the impression that 'Hegel' is merely a trendy brand signifying a rather incoherent reservoir of themes and ideas, from which would-be followers or renewers may pick and choose at will. It is the contention of this book, however, that both the irritating need to continue to refer to Hegel and the great variety of interpretations is not just a result of the contentious nature of his philosophy (or its irresolvable obscurity, which prevents us from reaching agreement) but of the fact that he touched on the critical points that continue to animate modern thought.

The question of Hegel and resistance can be broken up into three distinct points. First, there is the question of resistance *to* Hegel: what are the limits of Hegelian thought? The systematic aspirations of Hegel's philosophy have led critics to suggest various things which Hegel cannot think, which escape or are systematically obscured by his system, which resist appropriation by the integrating force of speculative philosophy. Examples are the object or 'remainder' in Adorno, difference and event in Derrida, Deleuze and others, material conditions in Marx, or the (non-European, female, etc.) other. The trope according to which Hegel's system always already includes its other, so that to posit something which Hegel 'could not think' is effectively to show that you are still stuck in the system of dialectics and there is therefore no resisting Hegel, is overly simplistic. Yet, as Foucault suggests above, we must strive for a maximum of self-reflectivity with regard to the question of the extent to which

we are still Hegelian. The ambitious scope of Hegel's philosophy is not a matter of dialectical trickery but consists, firstly, in the fact that the Hegelian text is almost always more complex than it is made out to be, certainly allowing for more 'difference', contingency and so forth, than traditional interpretations have it but also for widely diverging interpretations. And secondly, in the fact that Hegel was also an empirical thinker, integrating a wide range of facts and evidence from the literature, science and politics of his day, while also (in certain – perhaps rare – moments) allowing for the fact that he might be wrong. This means that attempts to criticize Hegel for what he did not or was unable to think always run the risk of being challenged, not by abstract claims of 'not being dialectical enough', but by actual elements of Hegel's philosophy that they have ignored.

This leads us to a second point: resistance *by* Hegel. Because of its complexity, its scope and its systematic character, Hegel's philosophy is notoriously resistant to appropriation and interpretation, which is always at risk of being selective, reductive or one-sided. It seems that we either have to try to absorb Hegel's thought in all its aspects and risk being unable to take a sufficiently critical stance towards it, or take some particular element which we still find to be relevant today at the risk of ignoring its context, both in relation to Hegel's system and to its wider historical and philosophical background. Is it justifiable to extract from Hegel a pragmatics, a social theory or a coherence theory of truth? To focus on epistemological concerns over metaphysical or social and cultural aspects? Or to privilege a particular text or period over another?

Certainly, the question of what is living and what is dead in Hegel's philosophy must always be asked. Hegel's context is not ours, and appropriate respect for the philosophical power and enduring relevance of his ideas must never be confused with uncritical adulation or mere scholastic explication. Reactualizing Hegel will always involve a significant degree of reinterpretation, selectivity and, not unimportantly, translation – a restating of Hegelian concepts in terms which both make sense in the context of contemporary philosophy, whichever particular field one is working in, and which make sense to contemporary readers. Yet, keeping in mind the aforementioned point, this selectivity, translation and process of 'updating' should always be accompanied by the highest degree of reflection on the choices we make in interpreting and the limits of our own position, as well as a continuing awareness of the complexity of Hegel's thought. In practical terms, this means that an ideal contemporary reading of Hegel will always have a double aspect. The first of these corresponds to what Robert Brandom calls a *de dicto* reading, which seeks to explicate what a

philosopher him- or herself believed and would ascribe to, based on contextual and textual evidence; the second corresponds to what Brandom calls a *de re* reading, which seeks to establish how an author's views and claims correspond to what *we*, as interpreters or communities of interpreters, hold to be true and valid.³ Derrida expressed a similar distinction with his notion of *vouloir-dire*, of 'meaning (to say)', which refers to the fact that the meaning of a text, while on the one hand tied to the intention of the author, also goes beyond this intention and must be understood in terms of its wider implications.⁴ This is a distinction which is hardly straightforward to make but must nevertheless always be kept in mind. Reconstructing what Hegel said (or meant to say) and interpreting what that means (now, to us) are, of course, deeply connected and should always go hand in hand, but interpreters should always seek to have an eye to both aspects, avoiding both a scholastic reiteration of Hegelian notions and freely picking from Hegel's ideas to fit them into one's contemporary research programme, but rather striving for clarity with regard to both the historical context and the contemporary relevance of Hegel's thought.

The final point and most important topic is that of resistance *in* Hegel. The core operations of Hegel's thought have always been understood and, to an extent, misunderstood, to be *identification*, *totalization* and *internalization*. The basic principles of Hegelian dialectics would be to reduce all difference to identity, to see everything from the perspective of the monolithic, systematic whole, and to internalize the whole of nature and history into the eternal conceptual clarity of Spirit's self-presence. What unites these three aspects with the whole machinery of Hegel's thought – with its teleological view of history, with the process of alienation and reconciliation, with the process of *Aufhebung* – is that these are all forms of *overcoming resistance*. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel presents his own method as follows: it is the 'absolutely infinite force, to which no object, presenting itself as something external, remote from and independent of reason, could offer resistance or be of a particular nature in opposition to it, or could not be penetrated by it' (SL 826). Similarly, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 'absolute freedom' is hailed as the 'undivided Substance', which 'ascends the throne of the world without any power being able to resist it'.⁵ Nature, the external world, other human beings at first appear as things that stand against us and resist us, but once we learn, through our shaping and cognizing of reality that, as Hegel puts it, consciousness 'is all reality' (PS 138) resistance disappears: 'Having discovered this, self-consciousness thus knows itself to be reality in the form of an individuality that directly expresses *itself*, an individuality which no longer encounters resistance from an actual world opposed to it, and whose

aim and object are only this expressing of itself' (PS 217). The logical aim and endpoint of Hegel's philosophy thus appears to be a system that does not ignore difference but rather contains it within itself, a harmonious machine where everything moves in its proper place such that it generates the least amount of friction and resistance; as Hegel writes of the absolute concept: 'as all-present' it is 'neither disturbed nor interrupted by any difference, but rather is itself all differences, and also their supersession; accordingly it pulsates within itself but does not move, it trembles internally without being restless' (PS 100).

Even if the method and movement of Hegel's philosophy thus appear to be essentially characterized by the overcoming of resistance, this does not mean that resistance is merely an illusion. For Hegel, dealing with resistance is not only the teleological endpoint, but the very substance of philosophy and history. This is why Spirit's unfolding in history is not a purely conceptual exercise, but a 'path of despair', a long, difficult process, characterized by hard labour, violent struggle and suffering.⁶ Without resistance there would be no philosophy, no history, since it is only in the confrontation with its other that spirit or consciousness can become what it is. But the essential question is, therefore: is resistance in the end overcome, and totality or identity achieved?

The answer to this question is by no means straightforward, and much of the history of interpretations of Hegel turns on it. Globally speaking, traditional readings of Hegel can be divided into two camps (more or less contiguous with the left-/right-Hegelian split): both of them took Hegel's answer to this question to be 'yes', and either criticized him for it (in the case of left Hegelians), or embraced this aspect of his philosophy (in the case of right Hegelians). In the twentieth century, the response became more complicated. While Hegel, on the one hand, became the symbol for everything that was wrong with Western philosophy – foundationalist metaphysics, the exclusion of otherness and contingency, teleology, anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism, phallogocentrism and so on – there was, at the same time, a significant revaluation. Adorno can be considered a most significant figure here. In his *Hegel: Three Studies*, he develops a way of reading Hegel 'against the grain' that, in terms of its method, is representative of many other more recent approaches.⁷ On the one hand, Adorno levels many of the traditional criticisms against Hegel: Hegel's philosophy is politically conservative and reduces everything to the identity of thought; it is a closed system, a 'gigantic credit system' where all debts are reconciled.⁸ On the other hand, Adorno clearly appreciates the subtlety and rigour of Hegel's thought, and greatly values its social, dialectical and conceptual insights. The key to 'going beyond Hegel' is, for Adorno, contained within Hegel, in notions

already present within Hegel's thought which the philosopher himself failed to make explicit. More is 'expressed' in a philosophical work than that which is actually (explicitly) 'thought' in it, Adorno argues; consequently, as Hegel does himself, we have to think starting from the subject matter, *die Sache selbst*:

Immanent fidelity to Hegel's intention requires one to supplement or go beyond the text in order to understand it. Then it is useless to ponder cryptic individual formulations and get involved in often unresolvable controversies about what was meant. Rather, one must uncover Hegel's aim; the subject matter should be reconstructed from knowledge of it. He almost always has certain issues in mind even when his own formulations fail to capture them. What Hegel was talking about is more important than what he meant.⁹

A very similar approach can be found in Derrida. Like Adorno, Derrida was not only one of the twentieth century's main critics of Hegel, but he was also tremendously influenced by him. Derrida's central notion of *différance*, he claims, is 'at a point of absolute proximity to Hegel';¹⁰ 'Hegel is *also* the thinker of irreducible *différance*'.¹¹ As for Adorno, for Derrida the central point is that Hegel correctly diagnoses the negative, self-differentiating, unstable character of all meaning and identity – of concepts, the subject or social formations – but, Derrida maintains, in the end Hegel subjects everything to a monotonous, mechanical process of sublation (*Aufhebung*, *relève*), subsuming all difference in an 'economy of meaning' where every dialectical move gives rise to a proportional countermove, where everything has its place and nothing is ever lost.¹²

Nevertheless, Derrida too believed that the key to going beyond Hegel – and everything he stood for, that is, metaphysics, identity thinking, teleological and historical determinism – is contained within Hegel's own thought. Despite Hegel's pretence at system-building, Hegel's work is not a closed, fully coherent whole, but a complicated composition of many different arguments and strands of thought that have been more or less effectively coordinated; thus, Hegel's own valid insights can be turned against the more problematic tendencies of his thinking. 'No more than any other', Derrida writes, 'the Hegelian text is not made of a piece. While respecting its faultless coherence, one can decompose its strata and show that it *interprets itself* ... Hegel's own interpretation can be reinterpreted – against him'.¹³

Of course, it is true that this tactic of reading Hegel 'against himself' is as old as the left-Hegelian tradition, starting with Feuerbach's emphasis on Hegel's historical dialectical method over its supposed theological and metaphysical substance.¹⁴ But in readings such as Adorno's or Derrida's, this theme gets

a specifically postmodern twist, where Hegel 'the author' recedes into the background and the autonomy and undecidability of the meaning of the text take centre stage. This development is due primarily to the influence of psychoanalysis. For this approach – and this is the crucial difference between this left-Hegelian current and many contemporary Anglo-American readings of Hegel – it is not simply a matter of sorting out the bad elements and the good elements in Hegel, as if we were in a position to authoritatively and infallibly judge Hegel's thought and its bearing on reality. We have to realize that, just as Hegel had no final say over the meaning and import of his own ideas, we too, as reading and thinking subjects, are ourselves implicated in the movement of thought; our interpretation is partially determined by our subjective and historical position. Reading Hegel is therefore an open-ended process; we have to continually return to or, as one prominent contemporary Hegelian, Slavoj Žižek, likes to say it, 'repeat' Hegel.¹⁵

The reason why Hegel remains one of the most important philosophers today is, of course, because he himself analysed the self-reflexivity of thought and the vicissitudes of the process of gaining knowledge like no other. For Žižek, it is such elements that make Hegel the most 'radical' and relevant philosopher today.¹⁶ In terms of his method, Žižek is remarkably close to Adorno and particularly Derrida, arguing that the point of 'repeating' Hegel is to conceptualize the hidden 'rational core' of Hegel's thought that Hegel himself was unable to think.¹⁷ Elaborating the Heideggerian idea of the 'unthought', Žižek maintains that this hidden core (which he identifies with Lacan's notion of the 'drive') is in fact constitutive of Hegel's philosophy, and that it necessarily remained obscure to Hegel himself.¹⁸ In a psychoanalytic sense, this hidden 'truth' of Hegel's philosophy appears only as a moment of resistance, as a disavowed truth which occurs in Hegel's thought and text only as a series of symptoms: in various forms of hesitation, delay, tarrying or negation, which resist the movement of thought (on this topic, see Rebecca Comay's contribution in this volume).

The topic of resistance in Hegel is thus key to twentieth-century and contemporary continental and, broadly speaking, 'left Hegelian' approaches to Hegel; and in fact, as this book seeks to show, to reading and reactualizing Hegel in general.¹⁹ Responding to Hegel does not take the shape of a straightforward rejection, or an adoption of one or several particular elements of his philosophy, but rather consists of turning to those symptomatic moments of resistance internal to Hegel's thought, moments where this thought appears to come into conflict with its own presuppositions, often making it appear strikingly contemporary. These moments of resistance can be particular concepts or

topics which, as various authors have argued, represent moments of important friction in Hegel's conceptual edifice which either 'deconstruct' Hegel's system from the inside, or rather challenge the standard notion of Hegel as a thinker of progress, identity or totality; moments such as madness (Žižek), laughter (Derrida/Bataille) or the rabble (Ruda).²⁰ Or, even more important, the notion of resistance can become the central concept for a revaluation of the overall structure and method of Hegel's philosophy. Insofar as Hegel's philosophy has always been understood as a philosophy of movement, development and actualization, and in particular as a philosophy which overcomes all resistance, such an approach would show how the moments of resistance – to movement, development, sublation, integration, identification – are themselves key not only to understanding Hegel's philosophy but also to the process of thinking and its relation to reality in general.

The chapters in this volume are divided into three parts. The first part takes up the fundamental question of resistance in relation to Hegel's philosophical method. In his chapter, Frank Ruda shows that Hegel's method, while appearing to aim at overcoming all resistance, in fact contains an internal moment of resistance in the form of the speculative sentence. By comparing Hegel to Foucault as a thinker of resistance to power, he shows that Hegel's philosophy is actually more effective in theorizing resistance than many more recent anti-Hegelian philosophers. Rebecca Comay reads Hegel 'backwards' through Freud in order to explore the intricacies of the concept of resistance. Both Freudian psychoanalysis and Hegelian phenomenology, she argues, have been misunderstood as offering a story of 'demystification' or 'consciousness-raising' where we get to the truth only through the overcoming of resistance. As Comay shows, however, we can find in both Freud and Hegel a different theory where resistance is never definitively overcome but only displaced, stalled or delayed. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, she argues, can effectively be read as a catalogue of resistances, showing how progress occurs only through an endless series of detours, moments of stagnation, repetition and forgetting. In the following chapter, Rocío Zambrana reconstructs Hegel's speculative dialectics in the light of Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image and Adorno's negative dialectics, arguing that all three ought to be understood as forms of resistance. Hegel thus appears as the source and inspiration for a contemporary critical theory, where speculative dialectics serves as a method of thought that interrupts and resists the positivity and reification characteristic of capitalist modernity.

The second part deals with forms of resistance in nature, history and anthropology. Resistance in Hegel is operative at many levels: from the organism's

assimilation of food to the subject's relation to the object of labour and from the formation of personal identity to mental illness, from religion to social development. Howard Caygill analyses the *Science of Logic*, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Hegel's early writings on religion to show there is a *spirit* of resistance at work in Hegel's system that is not recognized in the *letter* of Hegel's text. In his chapter, Kirill Chepurin explores resistance in the relation between the body and *Geist* in Hegel's anthropology, arguing that subjectivity emerges through resisting nature and through nature's resistance, while at the same time aiming at the assimilation of the natural to *Geist*. Bart Zantvoort analyses forms of resistance and inertia in Hegel's theory of social-historical development. While Hegel presents a narrative of moral, political, social and intellectual progress, he also maintains that consciousness, in its process of necessary self-overcoming, tends to get stuck in what he calls 'unthinking inertia'. In social-historical development, too, societies do not necessarily change for the better at all, but often get stuck in social and political inertia; institutions and laws which once appropriately expressed the spirit of their time continue to exist long after they have become obsolete and regressive.

The third part of this volume takes up the question of political resistance. Is there a place, according to Hegel, for political resistance? Or are we – as the traditional reading of Hegel has it – ineluctably forced to submit to the power of the state, to the status quo, or to historical necessity? Three chapters provide a balanced discussion: Karin de Boer analyses Hegel's critique of democracy and the limits he places on political dissent, which on her view are motivated by his concern to restrain arbitrariness and the rule of private interests in the modern state. De Boer argues that Hegel fails to distinguish adequately between justified grievances about political institutions and protests motivated by particular interests, and thus allows too little room for dissent. Nevertheless, the conflict between the rule of private interest and rational freedom is still a determining factor in contemporary politics, giving Hegel's diagnosis of the modern state, if not his remedy, enduring relevance. By contrast, Klaus Vieweg maintains that Hegel is, in fact, a theorist of political resistance. In a series of stages of rights of resistance, from Hegel's treatment of the right to self-defence (*Notwehr*) to the right to rebellion, he tries to show there is a continuous and consistent basis for political resistance in the form of a 'second coercion', a legitimate resistance against an usurpation of rights that is itself illegitimate. Finally, Louis Carré takes up the much-discussed notion of 'the rabble' in Hegel, comparing it to the proletariat in Marx and arguing that, while the rabble represents a phenomenon that resists Hegel's political philosophy 'from the inside', this may in fact be a

strength of Hegel's philosophy, because unlike Marx, Hegel does not eliminate the difference between politics and philosophy.

Notes

- 1 Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 101–2.
- 2 Michel Foucault, 'The Discourse on Language', in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 235.
- 3 Robert Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 94–103.
- 4 Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010).
- 5 PS 357. As is well known, however, Hegel is actually critical of this notion of absolute freedom, which stands for the desire to abolish all social differences during the French Revolution.
- 6 On labour, see PS 118. On the path of despair, see PS 49. On struggle and violence, see esp. PS 51.
- 7 Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 138–9.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 147.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 131.
- 10 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41.
- 11 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 26.
- 12 Jacques Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve', in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2001). On the same topic, see also 'The Pit and the Pyramid', in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 89; and *Glas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 167a.
- 13 Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy', 329. See also Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations* (London: Verso, 2010), 7.
- 14 Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986).
- 15 Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 500.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 393, 500–1.
- 18 Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 33–4.

- 19 Besides Adorno, Derrida and Žižek, see, for example, Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (London: Routledge, 2005); Karin de Boer, *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*; Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (New York: Continuum, 2013); Rocío Zambrana, *Hegel's Theory of Intelligibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
- 20 Slavoj Žižek, 'Discipline between Two Freedoms: Madness and Habit in German Idealism', in Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, *Mythology, Madness and Laughter* (London: Continuum, 2009).

Part One

Method

Hegel, Resistance and Method

Frank Ruda

Introduction: Resistance, thrust, counterthrust

Close to the very end of his *Science of Logic*, in the section on the ‘absolute idea,’ one can find a passage where one of the traditional cliché images of Hegel, namely Hegel as a hyper-rationalist whose system swallows everything and thus includes even the last bit of externality into it, seems to be confirmed more than ever.¹ It is a passage where Hegel not only refers to what he frames as his or, more precisely, as *the* method of the whole development of the *Science of Logic*, but where he also speaks about this very method as something that disables all resistance. This passage reads as follows:

The method is therefore to be recognized as the unrestrictedly universal, internal and external mode; and as the absolutely infinite force, to which no object presenting itself as something external, remote from and independent of reason, could offer resistance or be of a particular nature in opposition to it, or could not be penetrated by it. (SL 826)

This seems to be quite straightforward and clear. The method, Hegel’s absolute method as that which presents the absolute as idea, does not know anything external to it and overcomes all resistances; it is able to integrate and hence to absorb them. Where there was resistance, there has become reason.² Reason in its dialectical and speculative methodological unfolding thereby does not know anything but itself – reason would be in this sense fundamentally narcissistic – and hence there is nothing that could resist the infinite force of this very process. Here, Hegel’s method does not seem to allow for any outside, for any opposition, for anything that might be able to withdraw from its penetration and its force. A force that is in the last instance infinite because it ultimately only deals with

and circles around itself.³ So, if one hypostatizes this passage and turns it into a paradigm for Hegel's speculative thought *tout court*, it seems that there simply is no resistance in, for and maybe to Hegel (at least from the perspective of his method). From the perspective of such a reading, a title like 'Hegel, Resistance and Method' would ultimately make no sense. Yet, starting from the passage I referred to, one may even level higher and more specific charges against Hegel. This could be done if one links the passage above to another one in which Hegel speaks about resistance as the defining characteristic of matter, of materiality. This latter passage can be found in the second volume of his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* (§ 265), where he discusses the concept of 'thrust'. There, he apodictically states that 'what resists is material, and conversely, is material in so far as it offers resistance' (EPN 50). Matter resists and resistance is material. Matter is matter because it resists, resistance is resistance because it materializes itself, because it matters.

One can derive from this very passage the general claim that any proper materialist thought needs to entail a theory of resistance to be materialist. Yet, if one links together the two passages I quoted, one might be tempted to infer that Hegel is ultimately neither a thinker of resistance nor a thinker of matter and materiality. Hegel abolishes resistance and is therefore no materialist. He ends up being an idealist, who claims resistance (as materiality) can fully be dissolved by the dialectical methodical manoeuvre of speculative thought. To use his own elaboration of thrust: Hegel's method generates a force which nothing can resist; a thrust that cannot be countered, yet because it seems to elide even the last grain of materiality, in the last instance Hegel's thought lacks resistance, loses materiality and ends up in empty (i.e. abstract) idealism that does not *matter*. Yet, is it truly the case that Hegel can be captured under the label of the arch-idealist? Is there nothing to be gained from Hegel but the insight into the unavoidable submission to the method of speculative dialectical thought, which motivates the majority of fierce critiques of Hegel? Or, put differently and to make this point clear: Isn't the claim that there is nothing but the dialectical method of reason itself a highly non-dialectical claim (because it totalizes dialectics and hence ends up being undialectical)?

In the following, I will argue that Hegel can precisely *not* be criticized for what I elaborated thus far. I will rather defend what was attacked by many of his critics as his paradoxical weakness as Hegel's ultimate strength. To start this defence: How would such a critic proceed in overcoming and in resisting Hegel? Nearly all critics, with few exceptions, emphasized in one way or another the sphere of materiality (of practices, of the worldly or our bodily constitution, of history, of

language, etc.) against him. In Hegel's terms, one may say that the critics who tried to resist Hegel sought to emphasize resistance and hence the material aspect that could not so easily be absorbed into any system of reason. Resistance to Hegel always came with an emphasis on something unabsorbable, undialectical, something that could never be swallowed by dialectical thought and hence would continue resisting it and thereby also be identifiable with *something of and with something that does matter*. One may here, for example, think of the criticisms formulated by Bruno Bauer, Moses Hess, Ludwig Feuerbach, Arnold Ruge, Søren Kierkegaard or even by the early Marx. All of them tried to play out some material, not dialectically sublatale dimension that could – and this is crucial – in a *positive* manner resist the alleged narcissistic omnipotence of the speculative dialectical method. Ruge, for example, attacked Hegel for his misguided and unjustified generalization and logification of specific historical entities (states), which idealized them and thereby ignored their material conditions as much as their finality (in the sense of finite limitations and historical embeddedness). This criticism is still common and may be found amongst many proponents of so-called historical-materialist approaches today. In a similar vein, Feuerbach argued famously that Hegel, due to his method, loses touch with the real world and that this real world is constructed by sensuous and material beings for which one needs to account. Marx, at least according to the traditional rendering of his position, turned Ruge around and assumed that Hegel is too radically materialist (in a bad sense) as he legitimates the most profane and idiotic material existences by not being able to account for their very materiality. The final judgement of all the critics of Hegel is that the *thrust of his method* – the thrust whose concept forces Hegel to admit that resistance is material and materiality is resistant – abolishes all counterthrust, all resistance, and all materiality. Against Hegel, one thus needs to reinsert this very dimension into philosophical thinking for philosophy to avoid avoiding resistance. Resisting Hegel thereby comes with an affirmation of a material positivity. Resisting Hegel's thought implies an affirmation of resistance in terms of positive materiality that resists the thrust of the method and shatters all claims to totality.

I will subsequently argue for two things: first, I will discuss a more or less contemporary, and still paradigmatic, version of how to resist the allegedly Hegelian idealist position, and I will demonstrate the inherent deadlock that results from its attempt to directly affirm (a positive) resistance. Second, I will depict how and why Hegel's method constitutively entails what he calls counterthrust (*Gegenstoß*). In order to do this, I will have to present a more complex version of the (critical) reading of his method than what has been offered

thus far. I will do so by turning to what Hegel calls the *speculative sentence*, and I will argue that one should read Hegel's claim about the method that does not know resistance analogously to Freud's famous claim that the unconscious does not know negation.⁴

Contemporary anti-Hegelianism, or: The vitalist empiricism of Michel Foucault

For quite a long time, Michel Foucault has been one of the most acclaimed and frequently cited theorists of resistance. One of the reasons for this, one may say, lies in the fact that he tried to analyse 'complex phenomena which do not obey the Hegelian form of the dialectic'.⁵ Yet, in his inaugural address at the Collège de France, he concedes: 'to make a real escape from Hegel presupposes an exact appreciation of what it costs to detach ourselves for him. It presupposes a knowledge of how close Hegel has come to us, perhaps insidiously. It presupposes a knowledge of what is still Hegelian in that which allows us to think against Hegel' – only in this manner, as he later continues, could one not 'pursue the edifice of abstraction . . . break with acquired generalities and put itself [philosophy] back in contact with non-philosophy'.⁶ Philosophy is Hegelian when it is abstract and totalizing, when it absorbs resistance, and thought overcomes Hegel when it knows that it needs to break with generalities, universals and so on, and address the specific, the singular as that which resists theory's grip. Phenomena like the life of those unknown people who once came in contact with power and are thereby forever integrated into its archives solicit a renewed non-dialectical, materialist kind of thought. Why Foucault is interesting here is because he does not assume the outside of dialectical method simply to be given (that would be – very – bad materialism); he rather assumes that it is produced in a singularly specific and material manner. I think that depicting the impasses of such a project⁷ can thus show why even a conscious knowledge of what is still Hegelian and hence too methodical ultimately is not sufficient.

How does Foucault conceptualize resistance if it is supposed to resist Hegel? To answer this I think it is instructive to start with what Gilles Deleuze once stated, namely that 'Foucault's philosophy is often presented as an analysis of concrete social apparatuses [*dispositifs*].'⁸ It takes the form of concrete analysis because it claims that it is impossible to analyse discursive situations from the outside and in terms foreign to it (just like Hegel did before and like thinkers such as Rancière do today). Resistance thus has to be conceptualized from

within immanence. Resistance is immanent (this does immediately sound Hegelian). Foucault's work thus follows the principle of immanent analysis. And as 'power is everywhere ... because it comes from everywhere,'⁹ as he states, attacking previous models of sovereign or juridical power, one has to analyse concrete situations from the immanence of power relations. One has to be inside the specific power-knowledge relations because they are immanent to all other relations, to any discourse. But if Hegel is what needs to be resisted, the methodological question nonetheless arises: how are historical discourses concretely structured? How does one account for their materiality? Foucault's answer is well known: discourses are structured by dispositifs.¹⁰ First, a dispositif is a 'heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions ... in short, the said as much as the unsaid';¹¹ second, it marks the nature of the relation between these elements; and third, it is embedded into a historically specific strategy that it fulfils. As Giorgio Agamben rightly claims, 'the term certainly refers, in its common Foucauldian use, to a set of practices and mechanisms (both linguistic and non-linguistic, juridical, technical, and military) that aim to face an urgent need and to obtain an effect that is more or less immediate.'¹²

It is because dispositifs structure discourses, structure what is sayable and unsayable, what is visible and invisible, that they also structure society and any political order. And because they operate under the prevalence of a strategic aim – they try to react to an *urgent need* that constitutes them – yet follow at the same time a *process of functional overdetermination*,¹³ any effect they produce enters into some specific resonance with another. Thus the dispositif displays a procedure of endless differentiation and redifferentiation – any political order has to be analysed from the immanence of the historically specific dispositifs, their dynamic and first and foremost *relational* constitution. Deleuze is right to claim: 'A social apparatus consists of lines of forces. It could be said that they proceed from one unique point to another in preceding lines; in a way they "rectify" the preceding curves, they draw tangents, fill in the space between one line and another.'¹⁴ They are multi-relational formations that constantly reshape their form and content due to concrete and specific strategic urges. This is the reason that there can never be an 'all-encompassing strategy, valid for all of society',¹⁵ in other words: no Hegel(ian totality). For strategy is the name for the logic of multi-relational differentiation and redifferentiation. This logic implies the exigency of repudiating all universals. For Foucault, universals (and this is where Hegelianism is supposed to be exorcized) block the access to the concreteness of the concrete situation; they hinder analysing what needs to be analysed. 'It is this image that we must break free of ... if we wish to analyse power within the

concrete and historical framework of its operation'.¹⁶ One therefore has to start not, as Foucault famously attacked the Marxist and psychoanalytic tradition for, from a repressive model of social, political constitution, but rather from a productive one. This productivity is precisely the productivity of the *dispositif* seeking to solve a specific strategic problem, thereby bringing out ever-dynamic and ever-changing multi-differentiating relations.

A *dispositif* is nothing but a concrete instance that explains the endless reformation of a specific society or political order in a productive way. *Dispositifs* imply changing relations, and this is why they are the analytic tool to explain resistance and the potentials for it that exist in a given situation. They explain what a given historical situation is like and why it is like that. But they also explain why it is changing. Change happens because, as Negri and Hardt rightly read Foucault, what *dispositifs* produce are not objects for subjects – as the production of commodities is often understood – but because they imply 'the production of subjectivity itself'.¹⁷ *Dispositifs* necessarily produce subjects and subjects are therefore 'by no means a pre-existing determination which one finds ready-made',¹⁸ rather they are 'lines of subjectification ... particularly capable of tracing paths of creation'.¹⁹ This obviously means that change is necessarily subjective but subjects are at the same time nothing but a product of *dispositifs* – *dispositifs* thereby produce the change that occurs within them in a fully immanent way. Therefore 'we, we subjects, 'belong to social apparatuses [*dispositifs*] and act within them'.²⁰

This is also the background from which one can better understand Foucault's famous anti-Hegelian claim – that 'where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power'.²¹ Resistance is itself a product of power; it is that which is produced from within a historical *dispositif*, while it seeks to deal with a specific strategic need.²² Change happens because of resistance but resistance is a product of one of the *dispositifs* of power – *change is a matter of differentiating the dispositif*. Any subject, as an agent of change, is therefore dependent on the visibility that the *dispositif* – that is, power itself – grants it because it is itself nothing but a product of the *dispositif*. Therefore, it is not that 'the exception proves the rule. Rather, the exception is *within* the rule'.²³ Or, as Slavoj Žižek puts it: 'At the extreme point of his development ... Foucault conceived of the emancipation/liberation from power as totally inherent to power itself. Since power generates the very resistance to itself, the subject that strives to liberate itself from the clutches of power is already a product of power, of its disciplinary and controlling mechanisms'.²⁴ Foucault is thus caught in a vicious circle:

resistance to power is not yet accumulated power, because power itself produces something that it afterwards absorbs and integrates (in the form of knowledge) into its functioning – resistance will thereby have been power's own surplus-product, generating an increasing effectivity of the very functioning of power.²⁵ That which should introduce a change into the situation is nothing but an effect of the ever-changing situation. This is to say: 'Resistance', I quote Joan Copjec, 'puts into play what it would abolish; even the disavowal becomes avowal.'²⁶ This is because Foucault thinks that any resistance – being a negation of the present state of things – must positively introduce that which it attempts to posit against it and therefore can easily be integrated and put to use for the expansion and self-preservation of power structures. Or, to put it differently, he ends up being urged to state what he himself explicitly wanted to avoid, namely: there is no outside to power. Power is method, resistance does not resist it, and matter disappears. We end up with some sort of cliché-image of Hegel. When Foucault claimed, 'A power that only has the force of the negative on its side . . . This is the paradox of its effectiveness: it is incapable of doing anything either of what power allows it to do',²⁷ one may ask: is this not precisely where Foucault ends up with in his conception? Change is that which cannot but actualize itself because the immanent structure of the *dispositif* – that is, immanent power-knowledge relations – is nothing but ever-changing – that is, productive. *Change brought about by resistance is for Foucault immanent, possible and therefore necessary.*

Change happens due to possibilities that are – although historically specific – constitutive elements of any *dispositif* that cannot but actualize itself in one way or another. What is possible will necessarily become actual – *dispositifs* are machines of actualization. Foucault thus unwillingly becomes a theorist of historical necessity, since this idea abolishes the distinction between the effect and its realization. In opposition to Hegel, what one ends up with is a strange kind of unity of itself (power) and its opposite (resistance), which is much more like the cliché version of Hegel than Hegel himself. Everything that can be actualized must be actualized. Power produces – via the vanishing mediator of resistance – *power without exception*. If power is productive then the – *transcendental* – law of power has to be obeyed without exception – even resisting it is obeying it – and if it is immanent then there is no cause to it, no genesis of this law itself because nothing precedes it – it is precisely an ever-changing transcendental (that can never be changed). One can see clearly that this makes it impossible for Foucault to think the concreteness of historical specific situations. As Hegel put it: The empiricist, by wanting to think only the particular, lacks a notion of the universal; therefore he lacks at the same time a (universal) notion of the particular

and ends up being unable to conceive of what he wanted to understand – he ends up in abstraction. The same goes for Foucault: by including any thinkable subject and its emergence into the representative (knowledge) immanence of production (power) of the *dispositif*, he ends up being unable to think how this transcendental law of change – power and resistance to it – could itself be changed. Foucault – as a paradigmatic thinker of articulating resistance in a positive and material manner – thus in short ends up resisting thinking true resistance.

A Hegelian theory of resistance (against theory)

What to do with this? What to do with a criticism of a critique of Hegel that claimed to overcome the nonresistance in Hegel's theory? One way to start answering this is to claim that *Hegel's theory is a theory of resistance against theory*. What does this mean? If Hegel articulated one version of his concept of resistance when dealing with 'thrust' (*Stoß*), the simple question might be raised: does Hegel also account for a counterthrust, a thrust against the thrust of his method? And – perhaps unsurprisingly – he does. He does when he speaks about the very form of presentation that is needed for any true speculative method. The simple (and intricate) question to be answered here is: how does Hegel's method imply an immanent thrust against the very thrust of the method that does not know any resistance? Hegel's answer, as I will argue, is contained in his presentation of what he calls the speculative sentence. So what is a speculative sentence? One may begin to answer this by referring to something that Hegel once stated in the beginning of his lecture on logics and metaphysics in Heidelberg in 1817. There, he claimed the following: 'The wise spirit, by expressing a universal, has expressed something that contains the concrete in itself. Its sentence is approved, tested and purified through long experience. Another spirit can articulate the same sentence, yet here it simply entails something general separate from the concrete.'²⁸ This is to say: one and the same sentence may, if articulated by a wise spirit, articulate a speculative truth, or can, if articulated by another, be nothing but a mere sentence. In profane terms, this could be rephrased as a difference between saying 'I love you' and meaning it, and saying it whilst not meaning it. Hegel, marking here the difference between speculative sentences and others, indicates that they cannot be *objectively* distinguished from one another. This difference does not lie in the (objective) *substance*, that is, in the constitution of the sentence but must lie in the *subject* of the sentence, which at the same time

should not be confused with the grammatical subject of it. The subject of the sentence is not the subject of *this* sentence and also not its substance. This is why all attempts to objectively grasp the speculative sentence will never reach the speculative dimension but only the sentenceness of the sentence (which is what the mainstream of analytic philosophy and its pragmatist proponents do today).

Speculative sentences can neither be grasped through their objective characteristics nor via the features that determine the objective determination of the sentence. Hegel rather determines the speculative sentence by insisting that it relies on a different kind of difference: on the difference between, in Lacan's terms, the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enunciated. Speculative sentences are subjective sentences, not as subjective expressions, as opinions, but as sentences that can only be understood from the transition from subject of the enunciated to the subject of the enunciation, a move that mirrors the move from substance to subject. The speculative commitment to the speculative – that is, speculative thought itself – is what makes the speculative sentence into more than a sentence.

How, then, are we to conceive of such a sentence? The most elaborate depiction can be found in Hegel's introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He offers the following example: 'God is being.' Is this speculative on first sight? Maybe yes, maybe no. To understand this, one first needs to reconstruct the systematic locus in which the speculative sentence is situated. Hegel states that in the study of science – and one should not forget that 'the Spirit ... is Science' (PS 14) – one needs to undertake 'the strenuous effort of the notion' (PS 35), and this means to break with and give up habitual forms of thinking. With this emphasis Hegel already reacts to the incomprehension that his philosophical presentation produced. In the *Encyclopedia*, he already claimed that the inability to comprehend speculative sentences expresses only the unfamiliarity we experience in grasping abstract thoughts. What these sentences express is 'a knowledge, yet different from the kind of knowledge to which one is used in common life and also from the one reigning in other sciences' (EL 41). This knowledge is not a knowledge that could be expressed in the form of a judgement or a mere (i.e. nonspeculative) sentence. For, as much as what Hegel calls 'mere sentences', judgements are constituted in such a way that they can only present movement within the frame of an always already given stable grammatical – that is, logical form, which follows the model of assigning a predicate to a subject (of this sentence or judgement). In this case, movement is considered to be a predicate, a state, since our understanding and addressing as such predicates and thereby fixates. Movement becomes a predicate of a subject. If movement

becomes predicatable, movement becomes a state, a status, stasis. The form of the sentence [*Satz*] or of judgement is for Hegel not suitable to present movement because it posits [*setzt*] predications and attributions in relation to a subject and thereby retains movement as status. Hegel's punch line here is simple: movement as status is status and not movement. For movement is not an attribute that could be predicated.

The form of the sentence or of judgement prevents the movement of form, if the form grants the predication of movement. Hans-Georg Gadamer once remarked: 'the respects in which the subject is judged are external to the subject itself, which means that it always can be judged in other respects. Determination here is thus external to the subject matter and accordingly there is no necessity at all in its development.'²⁹ That there is no necessary progress means that there is no progress at all in a judgement, no movement. Rather, in it the externality of the relation of subject and predicate appears, which constitutes a moment of empirical contingency. Gadamer again: 'By nature we want to learn something new about a thing, and accordingly we reach out beyond the foundation of the subject to something else which we ascribe to it as predicate.'³⁰ That is to say, without speculative presentation, one cannot speak of speculative things. Hegel's method and its form of presentation, namely the speculative sentence, seek to resolve this problem.

The speculative sentence is hence not an ordinary sentence. Even if the speculative sentence cannot simply be identified according to objective criteria, it also cannot *not* be different from other sentences. Because it is a sentence, it inspires the opinion of an ordinary relation between subject and predicate and of a usual comportment of knowledge. The speculative sentence is objectively not distinguishable. That is, it is impossible to distinguish it from mere sentences or judgements, but at the same time it is absolutely necessary to distinguish the speculative sentence from judgements or other sentences, since one otherwise could not even speak of any kind of movement, and certainly not of the movement of the concept. The speculative sentence is absolutely necessary for the presentation of movement, yet as there cannot be any objective criteria for a speculative sentence, it seems objectively impossible to discriminate the speculative sentence other than through a speculative attitude. Or, to speak from another perspective: it is impossible to not read the speculative sentence initially as mere sentence or judgement and at the same time it is necessary to read it other than just as mere sentence. One cannot but assume it is an ordinary sentence (it is necessary to read it in this way), at the same time it is constitutively different from a mere sentence (it is impossible to really understand it in this

way). *The speculative sentence is situated in this double, parallax concatenation of simultaneous necessity and impossibility.* To render this in more trivial terms, one cannot but first fail with regard to the speculative sentence. This is in some sense necessary. This is to my mind a fundamental Hegelian insight. The false precedes the true, or, more precisely, it is the false which enables any access to the true. The speculative sentence implies in some sense the necessity of deception with regard to what one is dealing with. As Slavoj Žižek remarked rightly: ‘To grasp the true meaning of such a proposition [des spekulativen Satzes], we must go back and read it over again, because the true meaning arises from the very failure of the first, “immediate” reading.’³¹ Daniel J. Cook, in his book on Hegel’s philosophy of language, claimed similarly: ‘Such speculative propositions are ... no different from other propositional forms ... although philosophy’s language does not seem distinctive and its propositions not unordinary, they cannot as easily be assimilated as other modes of expressions and must be re-read several times.’³²

The speculative sentence, because it necessarily is unidentifiable as speculative in the first reading, necessitates repetition. It confronts us with something necessary yet impossible (Lacan would call precisely this the Real). Yet, here it is important to turn to its precise manner of operating, since only then I can substantiate my claim about the immanent counterthrust of Hegelian method.

Inhibition, symptom, counterthrust

In his *Phenomenology*, Hegel approaches the speculative sentence, which, as Werner Hamacher once remarked, is the ‘paradigm of the whole speculative movement of spirit in which the true is grasped not merely as substance but as subject,’³³ by clarifying in what sense the speculative sentence generates problems for our ordinary way of understanding, representing and thinking, that is, in what sense these problems arise out of treating the speculative sentence as a mere sentence. Hegel here uses an interesting terminology, which anticipates many insights of psychoanalysis: inhibition, swaying, counterthrust and so forth. He remarks that ‘the habit of picture-thinking, when it is interrupted by the Notion [and its presentation in the speculative sentence, FR], finds it just as irksome as does the formalistic thinking that argues back and forth in thoughts that have no actuality’ (PS 35). This passage is instructive, because it demarcates in a more detailed manner which two ways of common understanding and thinking are suspended, namely one that seeks to progress from one representation to

another and a formal one. Both thus start from determinations of statuses and not from dynamic determinations, even when speaking of movement. One might say, even when they speak of resistance they do not know anything of resistance. The speculative sentence, as the form of presentation of the movement of the concept, interrupts stability, all stable statuses and ultimately even the assumption of a continuity of movement (like in Foucault) that in the end regresses to being nothing but a static status (quo). It also breaks with the idea of grasping movement in the frame of a stable form. It interrupts stability as continuity (progress) and as form. It even breaks with the often assumed dialectic between seemingly continuous movement (which, because it is permanent, is no longer movement) and formal stability. It presents neither continuous progress nor an empty form. The speculative sentence interrupts because it implies another moment of discontinuity, one that does not simply relate to the form but rather to the relation between form and content. If one reads the speculative sentence in a common way and supposes that one deals with an average sentence ('God is being'), 'we learn by experience that we meant something other than we meant to mean; and this correction of our meaning compels our knowing to go back to the proposition [the speculative one, FR], and understand it [*fassen*] in some other way' (PS 39). But what did one mean to mean? Hegel's answer: 'that the true consists in a proposition, which is a fixed result, or which is immediately known' (PS 23). In a sense Hegel here attacks Kant, whose philosophical theory of judgement is, as Fredric Jameson put it once, for Hegel the 'working ideology of everyday life'.³⁴ However, at the same time ideology is never simply a falsity that could just be abolished once and for all.

The speculative sentence interrupts (it even interrupts Kant) and this interruption leads to a correction of meaning – it leads to a different 'Fassung' of the sentence (one would have to say many things about 'fassen' in Hegel). This means that the interruption is what generates repetition, it is its cause, it causes a return to the sentence itself. This is also why Hegel speaks, in the quote from the 1817 Heidelberg lectures above, of 'experience', for experience is clearly linked to interruption, to resistance, so to speak. Experience is always experience of something not working, of something that inhibits the usual flow of things, and hence of resistance. The speculative sentence interrupts the thinking that is too closely glued to content on one side (this is what Hegel calls 'material thinking', PS 35), and it also interrupts a thinking that freely floats at a distance with regard to its content, which Hegel calls 'ratiocinative thinking' (PS 36); these two modes of thinking are just two sides of the same coin. The speculative sentence interrupts even the seeming dialectic of movement and form and this

interruption leads to repetition – to a compulsion to repeat generated by the speculative. Both ways of thinking learn that the speculative sentence ‘means’ differently from the way one usually means, that is, it introduces a different mode of meaning. Hegel’s practice of the speculative sentence presents thus not only a result, but an act, not only a product but productions. This is how one can understand the rupture that the speculative sentence introduces: one assumes one is dealing with a result (*Resultat*) and one is confronted with an act (*Resul-Tat*). One assumes that there is a form but encounters transformation. What is enacted is a rupture from which repetition is generated. This is what determines the ‘peculiar nature’ of the ‘immanent rhythm of the notion’ (PS 36). It is this immanent rhythm of the notion that is presented by the speculative sentence. But how precisely does this interruption operate?

First of all, one can assert that it forces us to think differently, to grasp the sentence differently, that is, not in the usual manner, but in a speculative manner; it solicits a commitment.

The precise character of the interruption with regard to ratiocinative thinking is described by Hegel as follows: ‘The solid ground which argumentation [*das Rasonieren*] has in the passive Subject is therefore shaken, and only this movement itself becomes the object. The Subject that fills its content ceases to go beyond it, and cannot have any further Predicates or accidental properties’ (PS 37). The ratiocinative and formal way of thinking, which attributes to the subject of the sentence this or that predicate, starts to vacillate. It vacillates because the speculative sentence drags the form of distanced and ultimately merely subjective meaning into its movement. Dialectic and its presentation is not a subjective swing-system of vacillating arguments that lack content, since it is precisely the content which turns out to be the stumbling block for formal thinking due to the form of the speculative sentence. This form implies an encounter with the concrete that interrupts the overgeneralizing subjectivism of formal reasoning. In short, it implies resistance. That is to say, the movement – and truth is for Hegel nothing but ‘its own self-movement’ (PS 128) – due to which subject and predicate pass over into one another in the speculative sentence also affects the relation between subject of enunciation and subject of the enunciated. The latter does not remain immune with regard to what it says, reads, or seeks to understand, and thereby the seemingly fixed subject is directed into an abyss. The interruption of the speculative sentence leads to a vacillation, and this very vacillation in its turn becomes the proper object of thought. ‘Picture-thinking, whose nature it is to run through the Accidents or Predicates and which, because they are nothing more than Predicates and Accidents, rightly goes beyond them,

is checked in its progress, since that which has the form of a Predicate in a proposition is the Substance itself. It suffers, as we might put it, a counterthrust' (PS 37).

Inhibition occurs because picture-thinking [*vorstellendes Denken*] begins with a subject – of a sentence – and seeks to ascribe predicates to it by assuming it remains stable for the act of predication. The movement of the concept ruins this idea of a stable ground, because in it the subject repeats and reappears within the predicate. 'Here thinking, instead of making progress in the transition from Subject to Predicate, in reality feels itself inhibited by the loss of the subject, and, missing it, is thrown back on to the thought of the Subject' (PS 38). Picture-thinking is inhibited in its operation and there is a dysfunction. This dysfunction consists in the fact that it awaits a predicate, which is assigned to a subject, but in the predicate it encounters the substance of the predicate. Thereby the subject is no longer what it assumed it is, and the same also goes for the predicate as well as for their relation. More precisely, picture-thinking assumes a stable subject, then something of the subject reappears in the predicate; thereby it is thrown back into the subject, which changed its nature, namely it lost the very stable substance picture-thinking attributed to it, and it is precisely this loss of substance (i.e. an empty subject) that reappears in the predicate. Thereby, the assumptions of picture-thinking are shattered, and it loses the ground of its alleged movement from subject to predicate. The relation of subject and predicate, as Hegel states several times by referring to the relation between rhythm and melody in music, is here syncopated. The speculative sentence entails a logical – and this is what makes it speculative – syncope, it punctuates differently (one might here also recall what Lacan said about the tact of punctuation in analysis).³⁵

It posits a different emphasis; an emphasis that runs contrary to picture-thinking and formal thinking and produces what Hegel calls a counterthrust. Counterthrust, recoil, *Gegenstoß*, then does not mean as in Fichte an *Anstoß*, but rather that when picture-thinking seeks to progress in a calm manner from subject to predicate this progress is interrupted. There is an inhibition of this very manner of proceeding, simply because in the predicate there is a peculiar repetition of the subject and in this manner the subject will have been as assumed. The speculative sentence hence engenders a repetition of that which one sought to leave behind. What becomes clear here is that one is dealing with a type of repetition that generates the interruption. Repetition is, so to speak, what precedes and is constitutive of the very movement of the speculative presentation of the speculative method. Repetition generates interruption and forces to repeat. If the subject repeats itself in the predicate, picture-thinking

seeks a new halt in the subject, but the subject to which it returns is lost and it glances into a logical abyss: there is only the subject in the predicate left, more precisely, there is only a subject in repetition. Hegel:

Starting from the Subject as though this were a permanent ground, it finds that, since the Predicate is really the Substance, the Subject has passed over into the Predicate, and, by this very fact has been sublated; and, since in this way what seems to be the Predicate has become the whole and the independent mass, thinking cannot roam at will, but is impeded by this weight. (PS 37)

Thought seeks to flee the counterthrust of this movement but it ultimately does not know where to.

Freud has once qualified this as the essential characteristic of anxiety,³⁶ and it may not be accidental that Hegel states at the beginning of his *Science of Logic* that the main problem with Kant's philosophy consists in the fact that Kant was anxious with regard to the object. Inhibition, vacillation, counterthrust – one could in Freud's terms reformulate: inhibition, symptom, and anxiety. This is how in a first and strictly negative manner the movement of the speculative sentence presents itself – and it should be remarked that already for Freud anxiety was a marker not only of a dysfunction, but rather of a transformation which shatters the foundations of a world. The speculative sentence resists. It resists common ways of thought, and this resistance is its first crucial characteristic. In other words, the very form of presentation of Hegel's method is one which one cannot resist and at the same time cannot not resist. Resistance is necessary and impossible at the same time (and recall, this is the defining characteristic of what Lacan calls the Real).

But can one also grasp the speculative sentence in a positive manner? Hegel answers: 'Formally, what has been said can be expressed thus: the general nature of the judgement or proposition, which involves the distinction of Subject and Predicate, is destroyed by the speculative proposition, and the proposition of identity which the former becomes contains the counter-thrust against that subject-predicate relationship' (PS 38). The speculative sentence destroys the ordinary structures of sentences and judgements because it introduces another relation of subject and predicate, a speculative syncopated relation in which the substance of the subject repeats in the subject and is then emptied out within it. Hence, any substantialist view of the subject, suggesting stability, is lost; understanding is in this thrown back to an empty place, which precisely *is* the substance of the subject, and thereby understanding is again thrown back to the predicate in which the de-substantialized substance of the subject

is expressed. This means it can only be expressed as and in this relation, that is, as what Hegel also calls a concrete universal. Starting with the substantialist assumption of a subject-predicate relation, what is generated is the thought of a non-substantialist subject-predicate relation, which makes it possible for the seemingly stable subject to appear as a predicate as much as for the seemingly accidental predicate to appear as subject. The speculative sentence, which cannot but be read as an ordinary sentence, means things differently, speaks differently and introduces another kind of practice, a speculative one, with speculative grammar. The speculative sentence can only do what it does if it is a sentence, which is not a sentence. Yet, it operates in such a way that it generates an identity of identity and difference between subject and predicate and it is in the last instance – this is what goes for all truly deep sentences in Hegel – a tautology (the subject is the predicate is the subject is the predicate . . .); it repeatedly articulates the same; it is articulating repetition. But to read a sentence which is not a sentence, one needs a second layer of repetition, repeated reading, working through what cannot simply be said, what resists judgement and the mere articulation of a sentence. It is this second layer of repetition, which I referred to before as *speculative commitment*, that results from the rupturing action of the speculative sentence. It forces us to think differently, to assume a different kind of knowledge – one which one did not know one had, did not know existed – and this means that the speculative sentence generates a becoming-other. It resists, because it presents resistance. In other words, the speculative sentence presents resistance by presenting the speculative. It is the form of presenting that method which does not know any resistance, it is like Freud's unconscious which does not know negation because, as one may here infer: *it does not know resistance because it is resistance*.

The speculative sentence forces us to think, and this engenders a commitment and a peculiar speculative compulsion to repeat. It presents an exception – not as included in the law of movement, as in Foucault, but rather an exception to the dialectic of law and exception. The commitment it necessitates is nothing but a peculiar non-dialectical element, which is engendered by the very presentation of the speculative dialectical movement. To see this sentence, one needs a speculative commitment, or to put it bluntly: *one only sees the speculative sentence if one believes in it*. This is obviously not the cliché image of Hegel any longer. To conclude: if Hegel's method does not know resistance because it works with resistance, it is resistance as much as for Freud the unconscious does not know negation because it is negation. Resistance has to be understood as that which is at the same time necessary (one cannot but resist it) and impossible

(one cannot resist it). This is what can be inferred from Hegel's characterization of the speculative sentence. Speculative commitment is needed and yet cannot be simply deduced – it needs what Hegel frequently calls an *Entschluß*, a resolve, a decision. Hegel's theory thereby is a theory of resistance and first and foremost a theory of resistance against this very theory. Thus one can see why, in Hegel, there is no presentation of the absolute without resistance and no true resistance without a presentation of the absolute. Hegel is resistance.

Notes

- 1 One of the most impressive readings that goes into this direction, emphasizing the culinary connotation of Hegel's saying of history as judgement of the world (*Weltgericht*), can be found in Werner Hamacher, *Pleroma: Reading in Hegel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 2 May one not claim that the difference between Kant's and Hegel's method is one that can be summarized as follows: for Kant, 'where there was resistance, there ought to be method (reason)' – and this leads him into the necessity of positing something which escapes the method, such that we need belief; whereas for Hegel one can state: 'where there was resistance, there has become method (reason)', because there is nothing alien, no sheer outside of method (reason)?
- 3 It forms, so to speak, what Lacan once called in very precise terms an 'inner eight' (and maybe one should already here recall that this is what he takes as definition of the Möbius strip). Cf. Jacques Lacan, 'Science and Truth', in *Écrits* (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 731.
- 4 The precise formulation in Freud states that the unconscious 'knows nothing that is negative, and no negation'. Sigmund Freud, 'The Unconscious', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. XIV (London: Hogarth, 1957), 296.
- 5 Michel Foucault, 'Body/Power', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 56.
- 6 Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in *Untying the Text. A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston/London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 74–5.
- 7 I will basically be drawing on the Foucault from the period of the first part of his *History of Sexuality* and of *Discipline and Punishment*.
- 8 Gilles Deleuze, 'What is a dispositive?', in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, ed. Timothy Armstrong (London/New York: Routledge, 1991), 159.
- 9 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 93.

- 10 This is Foucault stating how far-reaching dispositifs are: 'What I should like to do now is to try to show that what I call a dispositif is a much more general case of the episteme.' Michel Foucault, 'The Confessions of the Flesh', in *Power/Knowledge*, 197.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Giorgio Agamben, 'What Is an Apparatus?' *And Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 8.
- 13 Foucault, 'The Confessions of the Flesh', 195.
- 14 Deleuze, 'What is a dispositif?', 160.
- 15 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 103.
- 16 Ibid., 90.
- 17 Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), X.
- 18 Deleuze, 'What is a dispositif?', 161.
- 19 Ibid., 164.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 95.
- 22 Deleuze goes even further and explicitly claims that the late Foucault also knows that any mastery of the self is bound 'to inspire new powers.' Deleuze, 'What is a dispositif?', 161.
- 23 François Ewald, 'A Power without an Exterior', in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, 173. My emphasis.
- 24 Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), 71.
- 25 In Foucault knowledge is internal to power relations. Hence knowledge and power form a self-enforcing couple: there is no power without the production of knowledge (think of the practice of confession that Foucault describes as well as of his theory of the archive) and any production of knowledge reinforces power structures. This is why the knowledge of new forms of resistance against power re-inscribes the very means of resisting power into power and therefore enables power to be even more effective.
- 26 Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (London/Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 10.
- 27 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 85.
- 28 G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Logik und Metaphysik. Heidelberg 1817* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992), 9.
- 29 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic. Five Hermeneutical Studies* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1976), 17.
- 30 Ibid., 18.
- 31 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London/New York: Verso, 1989), 208.

- 32 Daniel J. Cook, *Language in the Philosophy of Hegel* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 166.
- 33 Hamacher, *Pleroma*, 4.
- 34 Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London/ New York: Verso, 2010), 35.
- 35 Cf. Jacques Lacan, 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', in *Écrits*, 209ff.
- 36 Cf., for example, Sigmund Freud, 'Inhibition, Symptom, Anxiety', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*.

Resistance and Repetition: Hegel and Freud

Rebecca Comay

Interminable resistance, or, how to avoid talking about Hegel

In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud defines resistance in a very capacious manner: ‘Was immer die Fortsetzung der Arbeit stört ist ein Widerstand’ – translated by Strachey as ‘anything that interrupts the progress of analysis is a resistance’.¹ More precisely translated: whatever impedes the work from proceeding – from keeping on going – is a resistance. Freud sets the bar pretty low: to speak teleologically of thwarted *progress*, to set the terms of productivity, or even to define the goal or direction of the cure, is already to beg the question. Freud is talking about the bare minimum of momentum in an almost Beckettian sense – *Fortsetzen*: keeping on going, going onwards, going forth or further; it’s uncertain whether we can even say going forward. Resistance is what breaks the rhythm of what Freud will continue to the end to call the *work* – the repetitive, accumulating scansion from month to month, from session to session, from moment to moment, from word to word. *Whatever interrupts or impedes the continuation, the going on, of work is a resistance.*

This, as you know, pretty well covers everything: quitting; missed appointments; wasted appointments; lateness; forgetting between appointments; stalling over procedure; complaining about the schedule, or the fees, or the furniture; distracting the analyst with your charm, or with your annoyingness; doubt, dissent, disagreement; obstinate stupidity; excessive knowingness; quibbling over interpretations; acquiescing readily to interpretations but only so as to forestall discussion; assenting sincerely, even with conviction, but in such a way that the idea is somehow quarantined from any further association; assenting to interpretations but only through a dusty cloud of memory whereby you are able, sort of, to recognize the truth, yet somehow manage to keep it sealed off

in the museum of the past, as untouchable as a mummy under glass;² assenting to interpretations while remaining stubbornly impervious to their implications; assenting to interpretations but in the mode of fetishistic splitting or disavowal: *je sais bien mais quand même*, I know very well that this is true, but nonetheless I will continue to believe (and to organize my entire life as if) the very opposite is the case; preempting the analyst's interpretations by coming up with them first; cheating analysis by doing it on your own, over-preparing for sessions, figuring out everything in advance, always rehearsing everything beforehand; constantly doing extra reading; diligently writing down your dreams every morning instead of just remembering them patchily the way regular people do; diluting the analysis by talking about it all the time with your friends and family; shadowboxing over theoretical minutiae in order to prove your intellectual superiority; offering up theoretical subtleties to flatter the analyst's acuity or to establish your own collegiality; refusing to get better in order to demonstrate the analyst's incompetence or to show the uselessness of psychoanalysis itself (a classic example of bad faith, according to Sartre); getting better too quickly so as to prove his (and its) redundancy; clinging to symptoms in order to display the moral profundity of your suffering, to torment the analyst by obliging her to witness the carnage, to force her to confront her own voyeuristic investment, or simply to get out of doing the dishes; miraculously shedding these symptoms so you get to go home earlier.

And then there are the dreams. You start producing dreams that seem custom-made to prove the analyst wrong, for example, dreams so manifestly unpleasant that their only possible purpose could be to refute Freud's theory of the dream as wish-fulfillment.³ Or you come up with dreams that seem designed to prove the analyst right, but only in a vulgar, winking way, dreams lifted straight from the textbook, bursting with prefabricated *symbols* (as Freud designated these seemingly universal signifiers) – cigars, stairways, rotundas, trains: items drawn from the common stock of ready-made signs, each wearing its meaning on its sleeve, so blatantly obvious that anyone can surely offer up the correct interpretation immediately, automatically, 'without any assistance'.⁴ Or you dream up dreams so dense with autobiographical significance, so knotted with allusion, with all these associative pathways sprouting off in so many directions that they are simply impossible to disentangle, unpick, unpack, or analyse – the much-admired 'navel of the dream'.⁵ Such tangles seem to be written in a private language that defy commentary altogether.

I'll come back to these last two examples. The dream symbol and the dream navel are not usually spoken of in the same breath. In fact, following a cue

from Freud himself, Freud's readers rarely discuss the symbol, perhaps because of its embarrassing phylogenetic overtones, while the navel tends to be more appreciated than explored, perhaps because it's so gorgeous.⁶ But they're intriguing as a pair. Each presents a limit-case of resistance – a blockage to association that appears to be unmotivated and impersonal, a structural impediment rather than one serving any obviously strategic defensive purpose. Their contrast is also dialectically suggestive. The symbol is too universal to be informative, while the navel is too idiomatic to be understood – either an empty Esperanto or a blind idiolect, either too public or too private, either too transparent or too opaque. Combined, they present the outer limits of intelligibility and stake out the obstacle course through which every analysis must wend its way. I'll come back to this in a few moments.

Resistance is the stagnant, dead time accumulating between and within sessions, the Sisyphean cycle of obstinate regressions, false remissions, idle precipitations – the repetitive recycling of the same material, boring both the analyst and yourself with endless reiterations of the same complaint, or fascinating both of you with manic efforts to fill the time with entertaining anecdotes, amazing theories or penetrating observations. It's about the breakdown or atomization of time. Unmodified by intervening history, removed from circulation, the past intrudes as a static, isolated remnant; unconscious repetition takes the place of conscious memory, and the present evaporates from view. Or, which might amount to the same, it's the present that impinges; everything is happening here and now, as if there were nothing and no one outside the room, no time outside the session, only the infinitely dilating now, a moment of pure immediacy inoculated from every context, untrammelled by antecedent or aftermath, expanding infinitely to fill all time.

Above all, resistance is the breakdown in language when the chain of associations comes to a halt, or never gets off the ground, when nothing comes to mind, when speech fails to spark, when despite or because of your best efforts the whole thing sputters and stalls and goes off the rails; or when, fleeing silence, you fill the air by telling stories or by concocting theories about language's own inevitable failure. It's always tempting to think of resistance as a failure of productivity: the *work* gets interrupted because the analysand goes on strike, stops talking, stops generating *material* (strange industrial language) for analysis. But resistance can also take the form of a crisis of overproduction: there can be an endless proliferation of material that keeps forestalling any possible resolution; every interpretation generates new material to work through, new dreams demanding interpretation, new symptoms to consider, including the

vicissitudes of resistance itself. Either way, the analysis gets mired down in a search for resolution that is either preempted or kept dangling forever out of reach.

Resistance is the refusal or inability to obey the ‘fundamental rule’ or ‘ground rule’ of analysis – that oxymoronic, impossible injunction, a double bind really, that inaugurates the analytic contract by constraining or forcing you to speak ‘freely’ – to communicate whatever comes to or ‘falls into’ the mind, *Einfälle*, without selection, omission, evaluation, or concern for connection, sequence, propriety, or relevance. Like a passenger on a train (that’s Freud’s own somewhat Proustian analogy), you’re to report the changing mental scenery as it passes by, merely looking on, like Hegel’s phenomenological observer or even like Husserl’s, suspending judgement and leaving understanding and explanation to another (day, or person).⁷ ‘Free’ association is not a matter of self-expression or catharsis; the point is not to alleviate tension, to discharge pressure, or to tap into an archaic stew of primary process ideation. In fact, the apparent spontaneity of so-called stream of consciousness can be yet another stalling tactic – a way of plugging the void with noise. The point of the ‘free’ association method is not to achieve freedom in any immediate or obvious way, and certainly not in the sense of autonomy, free will or self-expression. It’s about suspending the official rules of language but only so as to allow the real constraints to reveal themselves in their unembellished tyranny. The aptly named chain of signifiers is anything but uncoerced.

These examples were all more or less drawn or extrapolated (sometimes mildly embellished) from Freud’s own case histories – from Dora’s belligerent defiance to Wolf Man’s lustreless compliance – including the snippets of Freud’s own self-analysis in the *Interpretation of Dreams* and elsewhere. My point in running through this laundry list is simply to underline the protean versatility of resistance, its indefatigable inventiveness, as it keeps shuffling unpredictably from negation to position, from affirmation to refusal, until the very distinction becomes unclear: every denial can mask an affirmation, every acquiescence can harbour a sly repudiation. The comedy of the exercise shouldn’t blind us to the seriousness of the stakes. That’s a lot of work to get out of work and a lot of energy and ingenuity invested in prolonging suffering. The inventory doesn’t begin to exhaust the repertoire of evasions, obfuscations, and prevarications that block the pathway of associations and interrupt the continuation of what Freud will continue to the end to call the analytic *work*.

There are also the ever-expanding social and institutional barriers – the panoply of resistances to psychoanalysis in the broader cultural arena (medical,

religious, scientific), which Freud will also describe in consistently military terms – a beleaguered garrison, a fortified enclave, a frontier outpost – and which like the individual resistances, and reinforcing these, run the gamut: suspicion, ridicule, embarrassment, scientific incredulity, intellectual irritation, professional jealousy, moral outrage. But resistance to analysis can equally manifest itself as a disconcerting absence of resistance – disingenuous credulity, vulgar pragmatism, stupid optimism, the very traits that Freud found most annoying about America, as it happens, the place where psychoanalysis seemed to be most easily assimilated, provoking least shock or outrage, and where he consequently saw the whole project to be on shakiest ground.⁸ He notes that the very tolerance of the Americans betrays a discomfiting disengagement: like the labile libidinal types whose excessively mobile or vaporous libido prevents attachments from adhering, their whole existence is a slippery surface to which nothing sticks.

Above all, as psychoanalysis acquires cultural capital, resistance to psychoanalysis will increasingly come to focus on the very concept of resistance. Among the many irritations induced by psychoanalysis, vastly outstripping the more obvious shockers (infantile sexuality, incest, etc.), none is more maddening than the assurance with which it seems to court objections, rewriting its own vulnerability, its tendency to attract detractors, as the signature of its greatest strength. ‘My expectations were by no means disappointed’, writes Freud of his most noxiously recalcitrant patient, Dora, ‘when this interpretation of mine was met by a most emphatic negative.’⁹ Every rejection is a tacit acquiescence, the very objection to a theory a perfect confirmation of its cogency, if only because it shows the speaker’s investment in denying it. Negation in this sense functions, rhetorically, as a form of preterition – an admission by way of denegation – the negative operator providing a kind of invisibility cloak under which the inadmissible material can elude the censorship and enter consciousness unscathed. In stating ‘not-p’, I allow ‘p’ to be put into words, if only at the level of propositional content. The negative prefix allows the truth to be admitted but as an empty formula: a pure *énoncé* handed over to the analyst like a specimen under glass, immunized from interpretative elaboration, recited as if suspended between quotation marks, both referentially and pragmatically opaque. The more vehement the refusal, the more certain the cogency of the intervention. ‘It’s not my mother . . .’¹⁰

This kind of thing is of course exactly what’s always contributed to the bad reputation of psychoanalysis as a science – its seemingly flagrant disregard for protocols of proof and legitimation: refusing falsifiability, it relinquishes

verifiability. That's the standard Anglo philosophical reproach, and Freud gleefully courted this reaction; but intriguingly similar objections arise also from the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum. Nietzsche-inspired critics will also take issue with the priests of lack (as Deleuze and Guattari describe Freud and Lacan) on oddly compatible grounds. Obviously, this is precisely the kind of indignation that Hegel has always provoked as well: the dialectical machinery always waiting in the wings, the evil genius parrying every resistance in advance, anticipating every objection as its own invention, converting failure into triumph, the slave ideology of the loser wins.

But Freud is of course being deliberately provocative. We've just seen that negation comes in all colours, shapes, and sizes, each one modulated by the vicissitudes of tone, mood, inflection, syntax, timing, and context. Negation runs the entire gamut: disagreement, refusal, disavowal, aversion, fear, excitement, desire, and hallucinatory foreclosure. It can also, as it happens, mean acceptance. 'No' is not a word you can look up in the dictionary or in a dream book: it's neither a stable lexical unit nor a formal operator guaranteeing the conveyance of forbidden content. Nor is 'yes', for that matter, a guarantor of affirmation, however many times you repeat it: we're not all Molly Bloom – a point driven home by Sydney Morgenbesser's legendary riposte to J. L. Austin. (During a lecture at Columbia, Austin had been musing on the fact that whereas a double negative always implies a positive, the reverse is not the case – there is no language in which a double positive can possibly signify a negative – whereupon, from the back of the auditorium, someone could be heard already darkly muttering, 'Yeah, yeah ...')

The point is that 'no', like 'yes', is strictly speaking a shifter or indexical: it draws its entire energy and significance from its site of enunciation. Peeling away the negation as if it were a price tag¹¹ does not in itself, says Freud himself, lift or overcome (Freud actually uses the philosophically charged word *aufhebt*) the repression,¹² just as lifting repression in turn does not necessarily remove the symptom, and just as, for that matter, naming the resistance does not automatically dispel it. In fact, it usually has the very opposite effect. This is because truth is not, as Hegel had said, a freshly minted coin (PS 22) – it's not a blind lump of theoretical or precritical positivity but a practical *result*. Intellectual acceptance of the truth has no bearing on its affective or pragmatic import. Even the analysand's more-than-simply-intellectual *conviction* of the correctness of a given interpretation does not guarantee the clinical validity or efficacy of this interpretation, however you might measure this efficacy. The Wolf Man will relapse almost immediately after Freud's last-ditch intervention,

despite unflinchingly (even if, it must be said, at gunpoint) endorsing Freud's interpretation, and will end up spending the remaining decades of his life in virtually uninterrupted therapy, handed on from one analyst to the next, generating more and more archival paperwork, more files, more case studies, more memoirs, and more deadlines, until his death. This is because any content that can be presented at a purely propositional or theoretical level, dissociated from the context of analysis, can only function as an extraneous piece of information and is thus tantamount to a suggestion – strictly speaking a piece of 'wild analysis' – and a subjection of the analysand to the mystical authority of the analyst.

Sometimes 'It's not my mother' can be a decoy to get the analyst off your back. It can be a way to avoid saying, for example, 'It's not, ahem, my father ...' This is a twist on the old Jewish joke Freud likes to tell: you say you're getting off the train at Cracow, in order to trick everyone into thinking that you're actually getting off the train in Lemberg, so that they're all the more outraged when, in fact, you get off (or for that matter when you *don't* get off: it doesn't really matter by this point) the train in Cracow.¹³ The logic has affinities with what Derrida (citing Koyré) calls the 'old Machiavellian technique' – speaking the truth on the premise that you won't be believed anyway – which is actually a sort of newish technique: Arendt identifies this as the basic logic of the modern lie.¹⁴ Which is to say that negation, like every other molecule of language, like every other aspect of our lives, is not a natural kind but a historical artefact.

In fact, as Freud knows perfectly well, by the time he writes his essay on negation, the phrase 'It's not my mother' will have become a recognizable 'Freudian' trope, the grammatical equivalent of a cigar in a dream, and is perfectly capable of functioning wildly, that is, as a piece of frozen theoretical (mis)information. By this point, Freud will have long stopped treating resistance as an obstacle to be removed through the coercive power of magic, touch, suggestion, or argument – whether through hypnosis, by a shamanistic laying on of hands (the 'pressure technique'), by the power of priestly charisma, or by force of intellectual persuasion. This is because the agenda of psychoanalysis will have irreversibly shifted from a hermeneutic of unveiling to a pragmatics of working through. It's no longer simply a question of undoing repression – bringing the unconscious into consciousness or dissolving illusion – but rather about examining the ongoing investments that make any such undoing either impossible or ineffective or both.

Resistance is not simply a resistance to the lifting of repression; it cannot be cleared away like a roadblock or dissipated like a mirage; the model of

‘consciousness-raising’ or critical *Aufklärung* is entirely inappropriate. There is no stable position from which the act of demystification could be undertaken because this very act will have been invested with all the ambivalence directed towards its object: the unconscious is no longer simply the object of investigation but will have invaded the entire analytic setting, including the walls and furniture. Resistance must for this reason ultimately be registered as a resistance to the figure of the analyst and ultimately to Analysis itself, which somehow keeps on getting personified, allegorized, mythified – a big Other that needs to be continually impressed, placated, flattered, seduced, ignored, defied. Resistance is in this sense less a stable or stationary obstacle than the endlessly reversible slippage or sliding, *Übertragung*, from content to context, from story to ‘setting’, that will define the transference proper. This is why the issue of time – tact, timing, rhythm, frequency, velocity, duration – will become so decisive as a technical consideration, and also why time itself (the sheer length and lack of it) will become such a killer. I’ll come back to this in just a moment.

Five plus or minus one

In an addendum to ‘Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety’, a latish essay, Freud tries to enumerate and classify the resistances topographically with a view to dividing and conquering (as has been often noted, his whole vocabulary is military-imperial-conquistadorial from the outset).¹⁵ As his catalogue accumulates, however, the obstacles take on increasingly molecular dimensions, becoming ubiquitous, protean, and directionless – less an organized army fighting on a unified front than a ragged and dispersed troop of guerilla warriors, launching their bombs and barricades unpredictably and from everywhere – and the prospects of mounting a successful counter-resistance seem to dwindle.

Derrida remarks on the uncertainty of Freud’s arithmetic as well as the oddness of the list. There are the explicit refusals of the ego, as an agency motivated by strategic considerations of self-defence: the reality-driven need to maintain repression at all costs; the inhibiting and distracting effects of the transference; the almost-prudential investment in the secondary gains of illness itself, not least of which the unquenchable thirst for recognition. (That adds up to three subdivisions, more or less, all more or less on the side of law and order, although the dysfunctionality of each of these mechanisms will quickly become apparent.)

Then there is the purposeless obstinacy of the id, in its fixity and incorrigibility. It’s hardwired to last. Structurally impervious to modification, indifferent to

contradiction, the unconscious is the embodiment of motiveless intransigence in its purest form – ‘timeless’ in its indifference to progress, the sequential order of before and after, cause and effect, ground and consequent, and as such, invulnerable to argument, induction, or the erosive force of habituation. Repetition is in this sense a bulwark against the wear and tear of repetition. (That’s a fourth, although the count is starting to blur, since this same obstinacy surely attaches equally to the ego, already itself half submerged in the swamp of the unconscious and therefore prone to the same repetitive insistence.)

And finally, most unfathomably and most intractably, there is the grinding ferocity of a superego hell-bent on ruining everything, ripping up achievements, undoing or reversing progress, undermining therapeutic alliances, administering punishment not so much for the purpose of discharging guilt, as a retaliation, as a deterrent, or for any other even remotely instrumental purpose, but for the sole purpose of provoking even more guilt, Kafka-style, that is, as a pretext for administering even more punishment, inflicting suffering to create the opportunity of inflicting even more suffering, prolonging illness for the sole purpose of prolonging illness, no special benefits attached, violence for the sake of violence – a kind of pure, disinterested un-pleasure, in a quasi-Kantian sense. To speak, by way of determinate negation, of *displeasure* or *Unlust*, with its sublime promise of moral profit, is very possibly to assume too much. Freud is of course referring to the death drive.¹⁶

Analysis will eventually therefore come to circle around a core of purposeless suffering – a suffering that will shed even the veneer of rationality, functionality or sacrificial payoff, and that will seek to prolong itself for the sake of prolongation itself. A strange conatus, void of teleology or purpose: this defines the essential drivenness of the drive itself, without which no analysis, or any other project, for that matter, could ever get off the ground. If analysis is literally to be understood as a dissolving or untying – this is the original meaning of analysis: an unbinding or loosening of the tightly wound knot of punishment and desire – the *resistance* to analysis consists of an incessant reweaving of this fabric of oppression and repression. Any attempt to loosen the weave, to unpick, unbind or *analyse* the knot of suffering is Sisyphean, or, more precisely, counter-Penelopean; the very act of unweaving is itself silently knitted back into the mesh, seamlessly reintegrated into the pathology, like an invisible scar. This is, incidentally, one way – of course not the standard one – of understanding Hegel’s most infamous statement that the ‘wounds of spirit heal and leave no scars’ (PS 407).¹⁷

Depending on how you’re counting, if you’re still counting, this might add up to five distinct species of resistance. But the categories have by now broken

down: everything is pounded and pulverized by repetition, everything is spinning around its own axis, which means there is no hard and fast way of determining the specific locus or motivation for any resistance or even that it makes sense to speak of motivation in the first place. This also means, and here we are coming to the most difficult kernel, that the 'cruelty' of the death drive must be considered in its most formal, unembellished abstractness – prior to any specific tendency to aggression, untethered from any libidinal investment in pain, withdrawn from visibility, 'silently' diffusing itself, unbound from the pleasure/power complex in which Foucault, for one, located psychoanalysis, and where he identified its most insidious disciplinary collusions.¹⁸ In the *Postcard*, Derrida identifies this recursive, repetitive structure as the 'transcendental tautology' – that defines the drivenness of the drive as such.¹⁹

This conceptual leakage between the various resistances *might* indicate, suggests Derrida, a common conceptual or genetic core. But if you try to introduce repetition as the mother of all resistances, that is, as the unifying principle or genus of resistance, the very principle of resistance breaks down. That is to say, it no longer functions as a principle, insofar as the logic of repetition ruins conceptuality, exerting an atomizing pressure that disintegrates the coherence of resistance not only as a category but also, and here the stakes become more than simply theoretical, as an effective force. If there can be no coherent concept of repetition, it follows that there can be no unified concept of resistance, which means that resistance itself, Derrida hazards to say, is at the limits a non-resistance, that there is no resistance in the sense of *la résistance*, a singular, focalized, capital R resistance²⁰ – which also means, and Derrida is explicit here, that 'psychoanalysis itself, *la psychanalyse*', does not exist either, that there is strictly speaking no such thing as psychoanalysis either.²¹

Freud's list, then, is either redundant or incomplete or both: 'five minus or plus one', by Derrida's reckoning.²² With this enumeration Derrida slyly suggests that the count is off: it's either inflated or truncated or both at once. Freud is either cheating by double-counting, or he's leaving off the most important item on the list – which is to say, the list itself. By omitting from the catalogue of resistances the motivation for the inventory in the first place – that is, the strictly 'lytic' or 'philolytic' drive to divide, classify, itemize and atomize – Freud leaves out of the picture, or at least conspicuously in the shadow, the auto-resistant or auto-immune thrust of analysis itself, torn as it is between its obsessional desire to break up or dissolve organic unities (its stubbornly dismembering or dispersive attachment to the work of detachment) and its archaeological, regressive or 'anagoric' longing for the atomic, the indivisible, the simple, the original, the

archaic. This split, which is equally a knot, simultaneously constricts or inhibits the work of analysis, holds it back from what it does best, that is, from *analysing*, and unravels it by setting it on an endless Penelopean labour.

Too slow, too fast

I want to return to Freud's early discussion of the dream symbol and the dream navel. Resistance to interpretation seems to oscillate between the two extremes of impossibility and redundancy. Either there's an excessive opacity that blocks interpretation or there's an excessive transparency that makes interpretation superfluous. On the one hand, the dream is bristling with idiomatic meaning, a knot of tendrils reaching ever deeper into the unknown but in their knottedness stubbornly blocking access to this unknown. On the other hand, the dream is coated with a veneer of socially acquired significance, its elements borrowed from the public domain, a mass-produced readymade produced by the dreaming collective. It's either so thickly woven that it's closed to further penetration or so thin that there's nothing left to penetrate. Either murky depth or shiny surface, the dream repels interpretation either by refusing exegesis or by offering up its own elucidation with such alacrity that it preempts even the desire for further investigation.

The navel is the magical detail that crystallizes everything but only for the individual dreamer and only at the point of dreaming. It knots together the entire network of associations but so tightly that it becomes inaccessible to every observer, including even the dreamer herself, at least by the next morning, or by the time she brings it to the appointment. Shared by no one, it escapes intelligibility altogether. The dream symbol is the breakaway detail that escapes the texture of the dreamwork – it seems to defy the principle of hermeneutic holism whereby each element will be woven together with every other and eventually tethered to the central organizing dream wish. The symbol impinges from the outside as a kind of extraneous 'day residue' from the collective patrimony: it can be explained without reference to the network of associations belonging to the individual dreamer and peculiar to her idiolect alone. Shared by everyone, it reveals nothing about anyone, and in its prosthetic exteriority has the incantatory or hypnotic – strictly citational or spectral – impact of a message from the beyond.

Either there is too much to interpret or there is nothing. In both cases, the archaeological or 'anagogic' model – interpretation as excavation, elucidation, uncovering, unveiling – is rendered ineffective; there can be no passage or

mediation between depth and surface because it's either all depth or all surface. Everything is either too obscure or it's too obvious, either too hidden or too exposed: the act of interpretation is either thwarted or pre-empted because it has always already been performed. These extremes mark the outer limits of analysis but also expose its intractably social and political stakes: the whole thing takes place along the shifting continuum of privacy and publicity, veering between the two extremes of an impossible individuation and a forced collectivization, between the two abstractions of the 'I' and the 'we'.²³

There's also a crucial temporal dimension (I'm cutting to the chase). Interpretation either takes too long, that is, forever, or it doesn't take nearly long enough. Everything is happening in the limbo staked out by the two poles of 'interminable' (or 'infinite') analysis and 'wild' analysis: between an analysis mired down in the thicket of endless hermeneutic hesitation and an analysis that keeps racing ahead of itself to the finish line, between sluggishness and haste, between obsessional deferral and hysterical precipitation. Either you can't get to the end because you never even make it past the starting gate: the pathway is cluttered with obstacles and you can't cut through the tangle of interpretative possibilities. Or you can't get to the end because it's always already behind you; you know the outcome from the very beginning, and the tale has always already been told. Either you can't cut the umbilical cord: like Tristram Shandy, you can't get born; analysis is either stillborn or the moment of parturition is eternally prolonged. Or you miss the end because you've already managed to get beyond it: like Hunter Gracchus, you can't die; the moment of conclusion has been always already overreached, and the analysis is over before it's started – every analysis is an all-knowing Oedipus, already certain of the outcome, reciting formulas of an already ossified tradition. Either way, you can't terminate: either you never get there or you've always already gotten there, and in any case the very fantasy of the 'there' will prove to have been the ultimate impediment to reaching it.

This brings us to the central paradox of psychoanalysis, which also happens to be the essential paradox of the dialectic and part of its ongoing provocation. On the one hand, resistance is the fundamental obstacle to analysis. With their incessant digressions, diversions, and prevarications, the resistances to analysis are always on the verge of derailing it forever. On the other hand, without resistance, without delay, there would be nothing but 'wild analysis' – which is to say there would be no analysis at all, only the shadow cast by the all-knowing authority of the analyst, or even by analysis itself qua personified subject-supposed-to-know. Any truth that presents itself immediately, without impediment, is itself an impediment – an empty abstraction, a fetish of pure

meaning marooned from history, a blind bit of theory thrust upon the analysand with no means of mobilizing it. Meaning must be postponed in order to be articulated: judgement must be deferred; every decision about truth, value, or signification must be suspended. This is another way of describing the so-called 'free' association method and points to its strictly phenomenological (in every sense) restraint. In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud describes analysis as a process of *travailler comme une bête* (he's quoting Claude Bernard's description of the scientific work ethic), a 'beastly', inhuman project, undertaken without regard for a final result or answer.²⁴ Without this suspension, nothing could ever happen because it would have already been achieved: everything would be frozen like a fly in the amber of the always-already accomplished past.

But at the same time, meaning and direction must be preemptively assumed. Even the decision, which will need to be continually repeated, to start analysis, to make that initial, insane commitment of time, money, mental energy, is premised on the presumption, very likely a phantasmatic one, that there will have been a final truth and purpose, that there will have been someone or something to ground the entire undertaking. Without that commitment, that mad transference attachment, nothing would ever get off the ground. Transference is not only the repetition or reactivation of familial or ancestral prototypes. It's also the pre-theorized, predigested, and pre-formalized investment in the process and person of analysis itself: the mimetic compulsion attaches to the very activity of interpretation. Every analysis is conducted in the tracks of previous analyses, every dream the citation of a previous dream, every couch the replica of a previous couch (as Plato already somehow in his own way surmised). The mimesis, or anamnesis, is triggered the moment you walk in and see the *Standard Edition* lined up on the bookshelf, the little portrait of Freud hanging there on the wall. The transaction is not only between individuals but with the very institution of psychoanalysis itself – which is another way of saying that psychoanalysis has an implacable political dimension.

Freud coined the captivating term 'wild analysis' in 1910, upon the founding of the International Psychoanalytic Association. He was getting annoyed by everybody who kept on ventriloquizing psychoanalysis, who kept invoking Freud's own name in order to hurl interpretations at patients without possessing the institutional credentials, without establishing the clinical context, and above all, without tethering a given intervention to the specific vicissitudes of the transference. The wildness in question consisted not, as one might think, in an unbridled spontaneity or enthusiasm but, on the contrary, in a kind of scholasticism or academicism that construes the truth of psychoanalysis to reside

strictly in its propositional correctness. We could in fact describe such wildness as a vulgar sort of 'textualism'. If psychoanalysis really were just a *theory*, writes Freud, 'listening to lectures and reading books would be enough to cure' people – the equivalent, he adds, of 'handing out menu-cards in a time of famine'.²⁵

'Misappropriation of property by attempted impersonation', Freud goes on to write, in 1914, of those who practice in the name of psychoanalysis without subscribing to its central tenets: namely, the 'facts' of transference and resistance.²⁶ Even as Freud kept on writing in this vein, he knew perfectly well that the border could never be secure. The wildness was never really on the outside; it was not a function of a lack of training or unprofessionalism but, rather, haunted the science from the inside and was even essential to its disciplinary momentum. For 'resistance' and 'transference' are of course precisely the technical tenets most vulnerable to codification, to mechanization, and thus to all the vicissitudes of bad timing – that is, most prone to working like a suggestion. Freud will playfully acknowledge this fact himself when he officially welcomes the self-declared wild man Georg Groddeck to the fold, writing provocatively in 1917 that 'anyone who recognizes that "transference and resistance are the pivots of the treatment" belongs irredeemably to the wild army [*wildes Heer*]'.²⁷

There is a point at which every analysis threatens to turn into a wild analysis: it must get ahead of itself; it must be jump-started if only to get started. And there's a point at which every analysis threatens to become interminable: it must forever lag behind its own presuppositions.

Time's up

At least in its formal structure, the contrast between 'interminable' and 'wild' analysis corresponds to what Hegel identifies at the very outset of the *Phenomenology* as the two inevitable temptations to be avoided (ultimately the two resistances to be resisted) as the project of speculative philosophy gets off the ground. Either the work never gets started, or the work gets finished all too soon. These are two sides of the same coin, which for Hegel stake out the outer limits of German Idealism – the evil twins, roughly speaking, of Kant and Schelling: the tepid waters of endless critical reflection versus the skyrockets of rapturous revelation, the bad infinite of interminable postponement versus the 'bad finite' of instant gratification, delay versus haste. This last antithesis already conjures up the antinomy of the master-slave: either everything has to

be consumed immediately, without deferral, and the meal is over before it's even started or the preparations take forever, nothing is consumed, and the menu replaces the meal.

On the one hand, there is the 'natural tendency' to procrastination (PS 46). You delay the beginning, you pile on the obstacles, you invent endless make-work projects so as to avoid the hard labour of the concept – sharpening your pencils, reading the instruction manuals, the endless propaedeutic prep-work that will culminate in Kant's critical philosophy, with its obsessional need to inspect the apparatus, to check the equipment to make sure everything's in working order, brakes and safety features installed so that you don't overstrain the engine or veer out of control and end up crashing on the rocks of the antinomies.

On the other hand, there is the (equally 'natural') tendency to precipitation or abbreviation. We seek the 'royal road' of instant gratification (PS 43). We grab for results, we race to the end, we want the whole truth given to us instantly in its unelaborated immediacy. Like a reader rushing to the last page, we want everything summarized or paraphrased in advance. We need the result delivered to us in one concentrated aphoristic burst, compressed into a single instantaneous abridgement, without remainder or delay. *'The true is the whole.'* *'The True is a Bacchanalian revel.'* *'Everything turns on grasping the true, not only as substance but equally as subject.'*

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel underscores the essentially phobic structure of consciousness: the critical fear of error conceals a far more paralysing fear of truth (PS 47), where truth itself amounts to the infinite abandonment or 'sacrifice' (PS 492) – the relinquishment of every last shred of positivity that will eventually define absolute knowing. To lose everything straightaway, to cut to the chase immediately, would be like dying all at once, without mediation, so we do our dying in bits and pieces. We forestall the inevitable, we hold back from getting there, even if this means getting mired down in the exhausting process of negotiation and prevarication (which is, of course, only another kind of mortification), which is life as such. Life, as Freud will show, is nothing but an infinite detour to death, a way of dying on our own terms, an avoidance that is just as forcibly a confrontation in that we court death in the obsessional efforts to postpone it.²⁸

Or we try to discharge everything before we have anything specific to discharge: we cut our losses by cultivating loss as such – pure intransitive loss in advance and excess of every possible lost object – a kind of melancholic strategy of preempting disaster by making sure it's always already over and done with.²⁹ Hegel manages to demonstrate that these two strategies are two sides of the same

coin. Like Achilles and the tortoise, we manage to forestall the encounter by continually overleaping it.

The *Phenomenology* is often read as a bildungsroman: the story of the steady accumulation of insight regarding the world, my place in it, and above all regarding my own normative commitments in securing that place, including the social conditions necessary for making and sustaining such commitments. As such it tends to be read as the story of progressive demystification or consciousness-raising – the gradual but inexorable overcoming of illusions or blind-spots, the clearing away of impediments to rationality, including the new impediments inevitably generated in the course of overcoming these impediments, and above all, those impediments generated by reason itself, the ultimate obstacle to enlightenment turning out to be not the opacity of things, the inscrutability of other minds, the recalcitrance of the passions or the unruliness of the body, but the resistance mounted by reason itself to its own inexorable demands. The ultimate obstacles to reason are those generated by reason.

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel compares the pathway of consciousness to a ladder (PS 14). What he describes is actually more like a game of snakes and ladders, where the snakes vastly outnumber the ladders, where at any moment you might find yourself sliding back to the beginning, and where the outcome is as often as not a function of chance more than skill. It's for this reason that the *Phenomenology* is such a long book: it's a kind of anti-bildungsroman. It's not so much that there is so much wisdom to amass, so much experience to digest that it will take forever to tell the tale (although Hegel will of course often talk that way). It's precisely because there will be so much to have unlearned. If consciousness won't stop accumulating experiences, if it can't stop archiving, collecting, stockpiling, this is not for the purpose of eventual recollection, not for the sake of having a story to recount or a history to remember, but precisely in order to have had something to disremember and dismember.

The *Phenomenology* announces its own trajectory as an 'unhalting' (*haltlose*) or unstoppable progress towards rationality (PS 51) – an 'irresistible' movement (EL §81 A). What it depicts is a thicket of evasions that seem designed to halt any such progress: every stopping point is on the verge of becoming permanent, every 'station' (*Station*: the Christian allusion is of course explicit, PS 49, 51) a place of interminable stasis and stagnation, every stage a stumbling block to further progress. Everyone always remarks on the bloated, engorged dimensions of the *Phenomenology*: the thing keeps swelling, the chapters keep getting longer and longer, the material keeps proliferating, the book keeps expanding, as if

Spirit can't stop accumulating until it has managed to take in the whole world as its material – the horrible digestive tendency that Hegel's critics, from Nietzsche to Adorno, have never ceased reviling. 'The system is the belly turned mind, and rage is the mark of each and every idealism.'³⁰ In the final pages of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel speaks of the inertia, the *Trägheit*, of the entire preceding trajectory – 'a sluggish movement', he calls it. 'Spirit moves so slowly because the self has to take hold of and digest the whole of this wealth of its substance' (PS 492).

The landscape of the *Phenomenology* is littered with corpses that, like Polyneices, won't go away – a heap of defunct structures persisting long after their authority, legitimacy, utility, enjoyment factor, and even antiquarian picturesqueness have disappeared. There's an almost Baroque clutter to Hegel's stagecraft (I'm thinking of Benjamin's description of the desolate settings of the German *Trauerspiel*):³¹ even as the scene keeps changing, the stage is never fully cleared, the old props and costumes accumulating long past their expiration date, abandoned attitudes constantly returning, refuted arguments continually reasserting themselves, relinquished desires resurging, everything crammed together in some kind of impossible simultaneity. The whole thing has elements of an eighteenth-century *capriccio* (Hegel must have seen them) – one of those architectural fantasias, sometimes sold as souvenirs, in which all the landmarks are crammed together without regard for geography, chronology or logic, the ruins of the Coliseum jammed right up against the Pantheon, the Villa Borghese on the same block as the Domus Aurea. (This is, of course, precisely how Freud will describe the 'eternal city' of the unconscious in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: a jumble of relics jostling together in an impossible phantasmagoria of space and time.³²)

Even more striking than the profusion of the material is the prodigious inefficiency of the narrative: the incessant stalling and backsliding, the meandering and repetition, the stubborn obliviousness, the self-censorship and the constant blackouts. Consciousness proves to be a virtuoso at forgetting what it learns – disparaging its significance, disarming its impact or drawing inferences that can be counter-intuitive and even perverse. What's most unstoppable is the relentless pressure of resistance itself, which proves to be anything but inert. Or rather, inertia, if that's what we want to call this principle of delay, finds itself capable of endlessly reinventing itself: consciousness will come to reassign the very categories of motion and rest: it will learn to redefine the terms of historicity as such. Hegel's most brilliant insight is that the category of 'change' is in itself an empty abstraction – it provides the perfect alibi for its own denial – while the

resistance to change can be the greatest impetus to transformation. In its refusal of the new, consciousness shows itself to be a genius at innovation, if only in its ability to keep generating ever more surprising strategies of avoidance. Hegel accounts for this clearly in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*.

Such hesitancy is not confined to the beginning; or rather, since Hegel will have established on logical grounds that every moment is strictly speaking a beginning, the work can get stalled at each and every moment, and all too frequently does. Every setback is an obstacle to continuation; every transition has the unpredictability of an *ex nihilo* beginning; the hiatus between every station on Spirit's journey is always on the brink of becoming impassible. This is why, at a narrative level (to return to the literary analogy, for what it's worth), the *Phenomenology* presents itself less as a novel than as a series of interlinked short stories. The connective tissue between the individual shapes is often tenuous; each moment threatens to become an isolated episode, a set piece waiting to be ripped out of context, quoted, excerpted, anthologized, and recycled. Which is how the *Phenomenology* is usually read and is almost always taught, as if it can be transmitted only as a compilation of greatest hits – 'Sense-Certainty', 'Master-Slave', 'Antigone', 'Beautiful Soul' ... Every shape is on the verge of becoming disconnected and encysted, every moment spinning on its own axis, always on the brink of dismemberment, dissociated from ancestor and successor, oblivious of its antecedent and incapable of going further – a fragment bristling uncomfortably against its own context, like a Romantic hedgehog.³³ This is one way of understanding Hegel's famous image of the 'circle of circles.'³⁴

This is not a contingent result of misreading or misappropriation. Hegel shows how an ineluctable fetishism is built into the very protocol of reading.³⁵ Hegel spells this out very clearly in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*. Thinking demands a constant dilation with the material – the famous 'tarrying with the negative' (PS 19) – a stoppage and suspension that can come perilously close to a Kantian-style exercise in procrastination. Hegel will identify this deferring, disaggregative, interruptive – strictly death-driven – rhythm of thinking with the work of *analysis* itself, the unsung hero of the entire undertaking. 'The activity of dissolution is . . . the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power.'³⁶

We can read the entire *Phenomenology* as a catalogue of resistances. Vastly outweighing its stockpile of rational achievements is Spirit's arsenal of ever more ingenious ways of erasing, preempting, deflecting or brutishly ignoring these accomplishments. Here are just a few of the techniques in Spirit's tool kit. Sense-Certainty can't retain a thing it learns. Chronically unable or unwilling to apply

its hard-earned lessons, like a schoolchild condemned to keep writing the same lines forever, the subject is continually thrown back to the beginning: it keeps stumbling to the same trap, keeps relearning and forgetting the same lesson, mulishly persisting (PS 64–5). This inaugural forgetfulness will set the tone and tempo for the entire narrative. Perception specializes in tactics of isolation. Stymied by its own antinomies and yet doggedly intolerant to their implication, the subject constructs an elaborate linguistic architecture of partitions and corridors designed to siphon off contradictions that if left unchecked would bring consciousness to the point of implosion. The idiom of Perception is a bristle of adverbs and conjunctions: *insofar, also, essentially* – tiny little syntactical fetishes invented for the sole purpose of allowing consciousness to sustain its own incompatible commitments at least long enough to buy more time (PS 78). The Understanding finds refuge in mindless tautological repetition. Failing utterly to meet its assignment and too tired to experiment further, consciousness reclaims its legitimacy by reciting empty formulas – a kind of whistling in the dark undertaken in order to reassure itself of its own continuing existence (PS 94f). Scepticism tries to disarm the deadly force of contradiction by turning its own incoherence into a form of entertainment: internal dissonance is externalized as pugnacity and trivialized as a spectator sport – ‘like the squabbling of self-willed children, who by contradicting *themselves* buy for themselves the pleasure of continually contradicting *one another*’ (PS 126). This losers-win tactic will be developed into a full-blown aesthetic strategy by Rameau’s Nephew (or his exemplar) a few episodes later, who will come to monopolize the entire session with his verbal antics: consciousness will learn to outwit cognitive dissonance by harnessing it to theatrical ends. The list continues; you can take it from here.

I’ve been dwelling on language in these last few examples. Above all, resistance is registered at the level of the sentence. Hegel’s philosophical enterprise stages an encounter with the obstacle of grammatical form itself. Every sentence is a struggle against resistance: not simply the stony recalcitrance of the facts, or the stupid persistence of dogma, orthodoxy, or opinion, but the blockage, within language, against its own illusory momentum. With the speculative sentence the movement of predication is reversed, the grammatical flow is turned back, the fluency of speaking and thinking is interrupted: this choking of speech marks thought’s recoil at its own precipitation (PS 38). To speak philosophically – to learn to read every sentence as a *speculative* sentence – is like driving with both the brake and the accelerator pedals down at once. To think philosophically is to dash again and again against the same wall, digging the same hole, skipping and turning like a stuck record, forever repeating.

Doorknob communication³⁷

All this interminable stalling and stoppage might suggest that the prospects of change are bleak. And of course they are. But then again, it's only at moments of symbolic breakdown that history sheds its veneer as inexorable second nature. It is the experience of stuckness that forces us to reinvent the entire field.³⁸

Notes

- 1 'Psychoanalysis is justly suspicious. One of its rules is that whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance.' Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams, Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), vol. 5, 517. [Henceforth all references to Freud's texts will be to this edition, indicated by SE, followed by volume and page number; Strachey's translations may be occasionally modified.] Freud acknowledges that sometimes the whole world can conspire to 'interrupt' the progress of analysis. So many events outside the analysand's control – war, illness, death in the family – can distract or interfere with the schedule. Freud addresses this issue head on in a provocative footnote added to the 1925 edition of the *Interpretation of Dreams*.

The proposition laid down in these peremptory terms – 'whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance' – is easily open to misunderstanding. It is of course only to be taken as a technical rule, as a warning to analysts. It cannot be disputed that in the course of an analysis various events may occur the responsibility for which cannot be laid upon the patient's intentions. His father may die without his having murdered him; or a war may break out which brings the analysis to an end. But behind its obvious exaggeration the proposition is asserting something both true and new. Even if the interrupting event is a real one and independent of the patient, it often depends on him how great an interruption it causes; and resistance shows itself unmistakably in the readiness with which he accepts an occurrence of this kind or the exaggerated use which he makes of it. (SE 5: 517n)

- 2 Freud is referring to the experience of so-called *fausse reconnaissance* (aptly labelled in French): the past is recalled, but so disconnected from the present that it might as well have been written in a foreign language. See Freud, 'Fausse Reconnaissance ("déjà raconté") in PsychoAnalytic Treatment', in SE 13: 201. I'm grateful for Alenka Zupančič's remarks on this topic at the 'Actuality of the Absolute' Hegel conference at Birkbeck College, London (2013).

- 3 See *Interpretation of Dreams*, in SE 4: 148, on the dream of the 'witty butcher's wife,' and Cynthia Chase's insightful commentary in 'The Witty Butcher's Wife: Freud, Lacan, and the Conversion of the Resistance to Theory', *MLN* 102 (1987): 989–1013.
- 4 'This dreamer belonged to a type whose therapeutic prospects are not favourable: up to a certain point they offer no resistance at all to analysis, but from then onwards turn out to be almost inaccessible. He interpreted this dream almost unaided. "The Rotunda", he said, "was my genitals and the captive balloon in front of it was my penis, whose limpness I have reason to complain of"' (SE 5: 375). On dream symbolism generally, which Freud himself initially declares to be merely supplementary to the dream work but to which, with every new edition of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, he will invest greater and greater attention (the number of additions to the symbolism discussion greatly outstrip any other additions to the *Interpretation of Dreams* over the course of its many editions), see SE 5: 345–414, and also Strachey's remarks in SE 4: xii–xiii on the editorial issues.
- 5 Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, in SE 4: 111n and SE 5: 525.
- 6 For some notable exceptions, see the outstanding discussions of the dream navel by Shoshana Felman, 'The Dream from Which Psychoanalysis Proceeds', in *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 68–120, Samuel Weber, 'The Meaning of the Thallus', in *Legend of Freud* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 101–20, and Elizabeth Bronfen, 'The Navel of Freud's Inaugural Dream', in *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 53–98. As for the dream symbol, two of the very few readers who have taken Freud's account of the symbol seriously at both a theoretical and a clinical level are Maria Torok and Nicholas Rand, 'Dream Interpretation: Free Association or Universal Symbolism?', in *Questions for Freud: The Secret History of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). For an excellent discussion of resistance to interpretation more generally, see Elizabeth Rottenberg, 'Resistance to Interpretation', *Philosophy Today* (2006): 83–9.
- 7 Freud, 'On Beginning the Treatment' (1913), in SE 12: 135.
- 8 Cf. Todd Dufresne, *Tales from the Freudian Crypt: The Death Drive in Text and Context* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 7–8.
- 9 Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (1905), in SE 7: 58.
- 10 Freud, 'Negation', in SE 19: 235.
- 11 Freud compares the negative operator to the commercial 'Made in Germany' certificate of authenticity, where the place of manufacture would in this case be the realm of unconscious desire (ibid.: 236).
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 For Freud's own slightly different telling of the joke, see *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, in SE 8: 115.

- 14 Jacques Derrida, 'History of the Lie', in *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), 63; the original formulation, quoted by Derrida, is by Alexandre Koyré, *Réflexions sur le mensonge* (Paris: Éditions Allia, 1996), 30. See also Hannah Arendt, 'Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers', in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), 3–47.
- 15 Freud, Addendum to 'Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety', in SE 20: 157–60.
- 16 Cf. Freud, *Ego and the Id*, in SE 19: 53, on the super-ego as the 'pure culture of the death drive'.
- 17 I explore some of the ideological ambiguities of this invisible mending in 'Terrors of the Tabula Rasa', the last chapter in *Mourning Sickness* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).
- 18 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon, 1978); and see Derrida, 'To Do Justice to Freud: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis', in *Resistances*, 116–18; see also Derrida, 'Au-delà du principe de la pouvoir', in *Rue Descartes* (2014): 3–14 (thanks to Elizabeth Rottenberg and Elissa Marder for sending, at short notice).
- 19 Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 403.
- 20 Dina Al-Kassim reads here a thinly veiled riposte to Gilles Deleuze's somewhat rarefied (and reified) affirmation of resistance in his reflections on 'R as in Resistance', in *Abécédaire*, the series of interviews conducted by Claire Parnet in 1988–1989 and broadcast posthumously on French television in 1996. See 'Resistance, Terminal and Interminable', in *Derrida, Deleuze, Psychoanalysis*, ed. Gabriele Schwob (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), at 108–22.
- 21 Derrida, *Resistances*, 20.
- 22 Derrida, 'Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul: The Impossible beyond of a Sovereign Cruelty', in *Without Alibi*, 246. This lecture of 2000, almost a decade later than 'Resistances', is worth considering in detail for its slight shift in focus to the institutional conditions of psychoanalysis as well as for its marked hesitancy regarding the viability of the concept of resistance itself.
- 23 Doesn't this tension afflict every attempt to narrate any dream? In his 1908 essay on 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming' (but the basic principle applies all the more stringently to the night dream), Freud comments on the peculiar impediment to recounting one's own dreams to others. The dream is intrinsically either too boring or too repellent to be narrated (sometimes both at once) – and yet it must be told; the inhibition against telling, against witness, is the very ambivalence that marks our minimal social bond. The 'true ars poetica consists in overcoming the feeling of repulsion in each of us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that arise between each single ego and every other' (SE 9: 152).
- 24 Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, in SE 5: 523.
- 25 Freud, '“Wild” Psycho-Analysis', in SE 11: 25.

- 26 Freud, 'On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement', in SE 14: 16.
- 27 Freud, letter to Groddeck, 5 June 1917, in Georg Groddeck and Sigmund Freud, *Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt: Strömfeld Verlag, 2008).
- 28 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in SE 18: 38f.
- 29 Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- 30 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Routledge, 2004), 23. For a magisterial reflection on Hegel's metabolizing logic, see Werner Hamacher, *Pleroma – Reading in Hegel* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998). I develop some further thoughts on this matter in 'Hegel's Last Words: Mourning and Melancholia at the end of the *Phenomenology*', in *The Ends of History*, ed. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (New York: Routledge, 2013).
- 31 Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1977).
- 32 Freud, 'Civilization and Its Discontents', in SE 21: 9.
- 33 Cf. Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragment* §206, in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
- 34 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 751.
- 35 'One must *linger* at every stage on the way, for each stage is itself an entire individual shape' (PS 17).
- 36 Slavoj Žižek has rightly drawn attention to Hegel's astonishing encomium, in the Preface, to the atomizing or mortifying – strictly counterspeculative – power of the *Verstand*. See, for example, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999), 30f.
- 37 There's an interesting phenomenon sometimes referred to in the clinical literature as 'doorknob' or 'door handle' communication. The session is wrapped up, farewells are said, the analysand is on the way out, hand on doorknob – and suddenly: 'Oh, and by the way, I'm pregnant.' 'I had a dream about you last night.' 'It's not my mother.' The academic version of a doorknob communication is usually: 'Time prevents me from exploring further. . . .'
- 38 This chapter is based on talks given at the 'Hegel and Resistance' conference at University College, Dublin, the Collegium Phaenomenologicum session on 'Law and Violence' in Città di Castello, Italy, the 'Political Concepts' workshop at Columbia University, and the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar; many thanks to Bart Zantvoort, María del Rosario Acosta, Stathis Gourgouris and Frank Ruda for inviting me, and to the speakers and audiences at each event for exceptionally engaging discussion. Some of my comments on Derrida and Freud were developed in my talk at the 'Unpacking Derrida's Library' conference at Princeton University; I thank Eduardo Cadava and Avital Ronell for inviting me, and everyone there too for great discussion. I'm particularly grateful to Elissa Marder and Elizabeth Rottenberg for their trenchant comments and to Frank Ruda for ongoing Hegel conversation. And many thanks to Natasha Hay for her assistance.

Dialectics as Resistance: Hegel, Benjamin, Adorno

Rocío Zambrana

Notwithstanding significant differences between their critiques of capitalist modernity, both Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno understand *dialectics as resistance*. Following Marx's inversion of Hegel's speculative dialectics and Lukács' focus on the fetish character of the commodity form, each sought to address what they saw as the central feature of capitalist modernity – reification. In Benjamin as well as Adorno's texts, dialectics is more than a mode of critique. It not only discloses reification as the characteristic feature of late capitalist modernity. It also 'breaks' (Adorno) or 'interrupts' (Benjamin) reification. Benjamin's 'dialectical image' interrupts commodified culture and progressivist understandings of history. Adorno's 'negative dialectics' breaks not only reified culture but also the 'compulsion to identity' that makes reification possible in the first place.

Although Hegel's progressivist philosophy of history and positive negation are central foils in Benjamin and Adorno's work, understanding dialectics as resistance is nothing less than the legacy of Hegel's thought in the two critical theorists. Or so I will argue. Throughout his corpus, Hegel's dialectics resists what in his early work he called 'positivity'. Speculative dialectics interrupts the 'fixity' that results from 'one-sided' articulations of freedom structuring modern institutions – from philosophy to politics to religion. This chapter discusses the significance of Hegel's dialectics for Benjamin's dialectical image and Adorno's negative dialectics, aiming to assess Hegel, Benjamin, and Adorno's conceptions of dialectics as three distinct models of dialectics as resistance. I assess each model in the light of a key problem that all three versions of dialectics engage – the static moment of dialectics in the light of its analytic or synthetic/constructive character.¹ This discussion will elucidate a central aspect

of the legacy of dialectics from Hegel to Marx to critical theory, namely, the commitment to the thought that dialectics is an inherently critical-interruptive mode of thought. It thereby invites us to consider the value of dialectics for critical theory today.

Hegel

While the structure of Hegel's dialectics is most clearly discussed in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the stakes are best understood when considering his early 'Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate'.² It is important to take note of Hegel's critical target in this early essay, since it will remain his target throughout his intellectual life. In this text, Hegel argues against what he calls 'positivity' (*Positivität*). Here, the term 'positivity' refers to an abstract understanding of law and ritual, one that displaces the authority of ethical, social or political relations to an external authority. Religion is positive, for instance, if it is structured around dogmas, rituals and rules that abstract from the life and customs of a community.³ The authority of these dogmas, rituals and rules is therefore drawn from a God or tradition external to the community. In differing degrees, these are forms of violence, according to Hegel, since they sever bonds between individuals, bonds that constitute the community.⁴ They compel individuals to establish bonds with a God or a tradition beyond the community itself, thereby purporting to 'master' the sensuous, living quality of the community – the bonds of life and love that constitute the community.⁵

Jay Bernstein has convincingly argued that this theological text is not concerned with an apology of Christianity at the expense of Judaism. The critique of positivity is rather a critique of Kantian morality.⁶ Hegel's early critique of Kant is exemplary, since Hegel argues throughout his corpus that Kant's moral *and* theoretical distinctions – duty and inclination, concept and intuition – not only generate an unbridgeable gap between the intellectual and the sensuous. They also establish reason over and beyond material, sensuous, historical life. They establish reason as master. To be autonomous is to master the sensuous, to allow the moral law to override the bonds of life and love that always already structure social life. The understanding legislates over nature, given that cognition is regarded as constitutive of experience. In both his theoretical and practical philosophy, then, the authority of reason is understood as an authority *over* natural and historical life. Kant's practical and theoretical philosophy, Hegel thus concludes, works with a conception of freedom as sheer

independence, as requiring the suppression of concrete social bonds and the subsumption of natural life.

In *The Difference between Fichte and Schelling's Philosophy*, Hegel makes clear that the dualisms of Kant and post-Kantian philosophy are expressions of modern culture, famously arguing that the 'need for philosophy arises' when these 'antitheses lose their living connection and reciprocity and gain independence'.⁷ Modern life, according to Hegel, is structured around distinctions that appear 'fixed' and whose authority is based on a turn away from natural and historical life. In response, Hegel develops a dialectical conception of reason that resists a fixed, one-sided conception of freedom. Indeed, reason must challenge the oppositions that have been fixed by reason itself.⁸ This opposition of reason to itself is elaborated in great detail in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, too, Hegel argues that 'nowadays' the problem resides in 'freeing determinate thoughts from their fixity'. The task, he adds, is to 'bring fixed thoughts into a fluid state', thereby 'giving up the fixity' involved in modernity's self-understanding (PS 20).⁹

The *Phenomenology* charts the contradictions that necessarily occur when the modern commitment to freedom relies on an understanding of freedom as mere independence. It does so by considering each purported claim to independence – from epistemology to science to morality, politics, art and religion – allowing the multiple sides of any such matter to arise. On the whole, then, the *Phenomenology* subjects the specifically modern claim to independence, to self-sufficiency, to a *dialectical treatment*. A dialectical treatment makes 'thoughts fluid' insofar as it understands concepts as self-moving moments, Hegel writes in the Preface (PS 20). Dialectics seeks to assess any given matter on the basis of its own concept, in the light of the claims it – modern epistemology, phrenology, the French Revolution, Kantian morality and so on – makes. Most generally, a dialectical treatment of modernity is precisely what is involved in the method of a phenomenology of *Geist* as laid out in the Introduction (PS 52ff). Consciousness examines its relation to the object by examining itself. It learns through experience that it must revise not only what it took the object to be, or the criterion at work in establishing the distinction and relation between it and the object. It must also revise what it took itself to be. The method itself, then, calls into question the idea that knowledge or truth can be established by appealing to a static notion of the subject, a subject that has authority over and against natural and historical life, a subject that is not subject to transformation in the light of its relation to objects, subjects or institutions.

In the Preface, Hegel gives arguably his most succinct account of his *speculative* dialectics. A dialectical treatment of any given matter requires a form

of thinking that resists understanding the given matter as static, fixed. It requires a form of thinking that can grasp the matter at hand in its unfolding, articulation, development. Hegel thus makes a distinction between comprehending thought (*begreifenden Denken*) and representational thought (*Vorstellung*).¹⁰ Fixity, Hegel argues, is the result of representational thinking's essentialist metaphysics. *Vorstellung* understands predication as a matter of essential or inessential attributes (PS 36–7). In a judgement 'S is P', the copula establishes an essential or inessential relation between the concepts in the subject and the predicate positions. The assumption here, Hegel argues, is that the concept in the subject position is 'fixed'. As such, it is 'made into the ground'. *Vorstellung* views the subject as static, 'motionless', as an 'objective fixed self'. Yet, something curious occurs when we examine the structure of judgement a bit closer. In effect, Hegel points out, the very act of predication establishes the predicate rather than the subject as the ground. When we say that 'God is being' or 'The actual is the universal', Hegel argues, 'being' and 'universal' are the 'substantial meaning in which the subject is dissolved' (PS 38). The subject (God, the actual) ceases to be the ground, the substance. The essence is the predicate.

This does not show that the subjects and the predicates in these two propositions are to be taken as identities, however. Rather, according to Hegel, it shows that essence is not stable. It reveals that what is taken to be the ground – the subject – essentially depends on the very act of predication. The very act of predication, then, articulates or unfolds the subject.¹¹ The predicate exhausts the subject only if we consider the subject as a static substance, as a fixed ground. For Hegel, the subject only becomes what it is through predication. For this reason, he argues, we ought to read propositions *speculatively*. Gillian Rose puts the point best when she writes that 'to read a proposition "speculatively" means that the identity which is affirmed between subject and predicate is seen equally to affirm a lack of identity between subject and predicate'.¹² This lack of identity expresses two important things. First, identity is something to be achieved, and therefore cannot be established on the model of predication of representational thought. Second, this lack expresses and thereby discloses the real gaps in modern culture, in a culture pervaded by distinctions that establish reason as mastery, independence as sovereignty.

The crucial point is that speculative propositions (*spekulative Sätze*) 'destroy ... the distinction between subject and predicate' maintained by representational thought (PS 38). When we read a proposition speculatively, representational thought is 'checked in its progress' (*in seinem Fortlaufen gehemmt*, PS 37). It 'suffers a counterthrust' (*einen Gegenstoß*). Speculative

thought grasps matters in their unfolding, in their articulation. As Hegel puts it, it is able to grasp that ‘the Notion is the object’s own self, which presents itself as the *coming-to-be of the object*, it is not a passive subject inertly supporting accidents; it is, on the contrary, the self-moving Notion which takes its determinations back into itself’ (PS 37). A dialectical treatment of any given matter is thus a *speculative treatment*. It is an account from the perspective of speculative thought. Speculative thinking can grasp any given matter on the basis of what it is not – on the basis of what is external to it, what allows it to unfold, indeed its opposite. Freedom cannot be fully understood without grasping that it is the result of the entanglement between dependence and independence. The master-slave dialectic is the most famous example of such entanglement within Hegel’s corpus.

We have seen that speculative thought resists fixity. However, speculative dialectics contains a moment of stasis that is central to Hegel’s understanding of dialectics as resistance.¹³ In providing an account of any given matter in its development, speculative thinking purportedly presents the matter in its transparency. In doing so, it arrives at a moment of repose. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, for example, Hegel famously writes:

The True is thus the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose . . . In the *whole* of the movement, seen as a state of repose, what distinguishes itself therein, and gives itself particular existence, is preserved as something that *recollects* itself, whose existence is self-knowledge, and whose self-knowledge is just as immediately existence. (PS 27–8)

Speculative-dialectical thinking rests in knowing the matter in its unfolding and in knowing itself as the form of truth. Although Benjamin and Adorno resist precisely this aspect of Hegel’s dialectics, we should not dismiss it too quickly. It is helpful here to recall Rose’s suggestion that to read a proposition speculatively, to treat a matter dialectically, means that the identity which is affirmed is seen equally to affirm a lack of identity. The master-slave dialectic arrives at a point of rest when it recognizes the lack of identity involved in the entanglement of dependence-independence, when it comprehends that a sovereign conception of freedom only exacerbates the irreducible tension between self and other. Speculative dialectics, then, is able to ‘resolve’ such a lack by comprehending it. It does not dissolve it. Rather, it is able to disclose and understand the fixed determination and its pernicious consequences. It remains at rest in grasping the lack of identity, the irreducible negativity of the matter at hand.

Speculative dialectics is thus a mode of advance that is both analytic and synthetic, an advance that is also a regress.¹⁴ In the *Phenomenology*, this advance is described as ‘development’ (*Entwicklung*). Speculative thought grasps things themselves in their unfolding in and through conditions that exceed it. It can therefore be said to be analytic, since it merely develops what the matter at hand always already is. But it is equally synthetic, since the matter at hand is only through an other. It is only on the basis of what it is not, on the basis of what is external to it, what allows it to unfold, its opposite. The analytic-synthetic movement of speculative dialectics makes the retrospective reconstruction of modernity in the *Phenomenology* possible.¹⁵ It calls into question the ways in which, throughout Western culture, the commitment to freedom has been fixed as sheer independence. The *Phenomenology* as a whole seeks to disturb this narrative by showing how that ideal is untenable. It resists an understanding of reason as mastery and freedom as sovereignty by enlivening such claims – by dissolving their fixity.

Benjamin

While the structure of Benjamin’s dialectical image is best reconstructed by considering the depictions of dialectics in three texts – the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’ to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, the *Arcades Project* and ‘On the Concept of History’ – the stakes of his dialectics can be best clarified by considering his early essay ‘The Life of Students.’ The essay develops a critique of the German university system. At the surface, it aims to dispel the idea that critique requires an historical description of institutions.¹⁶ However, the essay also intimates Benjamin’s lifelong view that the task of criticism requires a rejection of progressivist philosophies of history and the articulation of a notion of history in terms of a focal point.¹⁷ Throughout his writings, Benjamin seeks to displace the modality of the Hegelian-Marxist teleological view of history, namely, necessity. Because necessity *justifies* rather than critically *redeems* historical phenomena, progressivist philosophies of history can only support histories written by the victor, as Benjamin puts it in ‘On the Concept of History.’ Progressivist conceptions of history not only mystify historical experience, according to Benjamin, they are central features of reified experience. They are central, that is, to the type of forgetting distinctive of reification.¹⁸ It is the ‘trash’ of history, the marginalized facts of history – quotidian objects and practices, such as the unique story of the soldier, for instance – that can exhibit the truth of late capitalist modernity.¹⁹

The trash of history, to be clear, does not out of necessity disclose the truth of the development of capitalist modernity. In redeeming what has been forgotten, covered over by the narrative consolidated by those in power, features of capitalist modernity can be gleaned in their truth. This is why, in 'The Life of Students', Benjamin argues that the task of critique is to 'liberate the future from its deformations in the present by an act of cognition.'²⁰ Congealed in the present is a past that can be redeemed. To redeem the past is not to justify it. Rather, it is to *recognize* it. Such recognition, however, is just as much a recognition of the present conditions that make it recognizable in the first place. In redeeming what has been marginalized, what has been made invisible by official historical narratives, history as understood from the perspective of the victor can be interrupted. The future can be saved by its distortion in the present – a distortion that is possible by a specific type of forgetting the past.²¹

The 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', the *Arcades Project* and 'On the Concept of History' all depict dialectics accordingly. Just as reason resists reason in Hegel's work, dialectics resist dialectics in Benjamin's writings. Key here is Benjamin's rejection of the Hegelian emphasis on transition. In Hegel's work, transitions are a matter of necessity and actuality. Throughout the *Phenomenology*, for example, consciousness must revise its understanding of the object, the criterion and itself in the light of the specific contradiction into which it fell. This revision is a necessary transition to an alternative yet specific form of understanding and self-understanding. Any given matter can be grasped in its truth when grasped in its unfolding, when understood in its transitional rather than static character. In contrast, Benjamin maintains that dialectics must hold in the greatest of tensions the contradictions of history. This requires letting go of the assumption that the contradictory elements are necessarily related, that their relations are transitions to be clarified. Interrupting official historical narratives, recovering the marginalized elements that can properly disclose that history requires *freezing* the tensions of history. Rejecting dialectical necessity thus requires bringing dialectics to a 'standstill' (*Stillstellung*). Dialectics is interruptive, then, when it is seen as figural (*bildlich*) rather than narrative. The image presents a 'still' rather than a transition.²²

The 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' is an important starting point for understanding Benjamin's dialectical image. In this text, Benjamin articulates the notion of *constellation* central to the dialectical image. With the notion of constellation Benjamin proposes to think historical intelligibility without Hegelian transition. The notion is introduced as one in four formulations of Benjamin's theory of ideas, formulations that aim to be models for thinking the

redemption of phenomena.²³ Ideas allow us to *construct* meaningful relations between empirical phenomena without subsuming any given phenomenon under a concept.²⁴ They do not initiate an analytic exposition of a concept or a phenomenon. 'Ideas are to object as constellations are to the stars,' since they are 'neither their concepts nor their laws, they do not contribute to the knowledge of phenomena, such that phenomena can serve as criteria to judge the existence of ideas'.²⁵ Ideas are 'timeless constellations' in which elements are 'seen as points in such constellations'. In being 'most clearly evident in extremes,' each element, each star, can be redeemed. A constellation constructs a relation between stars that allows them to appear in their singularity, while at the same time standing in relation to each other. The constellation redeems the star by placing it within a meaningful set of relations that allows it to shine in its truth. But because a constellation merely juxtaposes stars, it can only disclose the truth of this particular constellation. Because its truth claim is restricted in this way, a constellation does not compromise the singularity of each star. In fact, it cannot speak the truth of the star in its immediacy, outside of the constellation. It speaks the truth that can be recognized in the light of the constellation.

In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin further develops this conception of historical intelligibility – intelligibility as construction, intelligibility in juxtaposition – with reference to the method of literary montage. For our purposes, the crucial point is that the *Arcades Project* clarifies the relation between constellation and dialectics as distinctive of a 'materialist presentation of history'.²⁶ The *Arcades Project* constructs the history of the nineteenth century by exhibiting the phantasmagoria and commodity fetish distinctive of capitalist modernity. It constructs the 'primal history of the nineteenth century' by focusing on objects, topics, authors such as fashion, boredom, mirrors, the flaneur, Baudelaire. Through a 'shock-like montage' of the material collected, the materialist history constructed in the *Arcades Project* seeks to 'awaken' modernity from its dreamlike state. For Benjamin, 'the object constructed in the materialist presentation of history is itself the dialectical image'.²⁷ Constructing a history by juxtaposing marginal objects and practices is constructing a dialectical image.²⁸ It is to form a constellation that makes possible historical intelligibility in a nonnarrative, nonlinear way. The dialectical image justifies no event, given its place within a larger narrative. Rather, it justifies the object's, practice's, experience's, or event's 'violent expulsion from the continuum of historical process'.²⁹ Such a blast awakens a commodified culture, thereby resisting historical forgetting.³⁰ The power of the dialectical image lies, then, in constructing the history of an object, practice, experience, or event.

A materialist history is the result of the *recognizability* of the past in the 'now' (*Jetztzeit*). The now is not the present, for Benjamin. It is rather the present moment of danger and crisis. It is the urgency of present conditions. As Benjamin puts it, the now is the 'perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded'.³¹ The critical, interruptive power of the dialectical image is thus based on the 'now of recognizability' (*Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*). It is the present state of crisis, of danger that makes possible recognizing, reading, recovering the object, practice, or event. This is not to say that the past casts light on the present or the present casts light on the past. Benjamin clarifies that the 'image is that wherein what-has-been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation'.³² The dialectical image is not temporal, but 'figural'. What the figure presents is a 'time differential' (*Zeitdifferential*) incompatible with progressivist notions of history dependent on a linear conception of time.³³ It resists, interrupts the narrative structure of official history. It makes possible historical intelligibility on the basis of the crisis in the now and its recovery of the past like pearls on the bottom of the sea.³⁴ The dialectical image grasps 'in a flash' the relation of the 'what-has-been to the now'.

The *Arcades Project* carries out a materialist presentation of history focusing on nineteenth-century Paris. In contrast, 'On the Concept of History' thematizes the relation between the dialectical image and a materialist presentation of history in the light of a critique of philosophies of history – historical materialism as well as historicism.³⁵ The text itself seeks to interrupt the progressivist philosophies of history at the heart of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, a view of history that neutralized an opposition to the rise of fascism.³⁶ Fascism is the now that compels resistance to conceptions of history as progress and history as the 'eternal image of the past'.³⁷ Displacing these two philosophies of history requires displacing their conceptions of temporality – what Benjamin calls 'homogenous and empty time'.³⁸ In both historical materialism and historicism, time is seen as a continuum of past-present-future. As we have seen, *Jetztzeit* seeks to think of historical time outside of a logic of transition, as a continuum. 'To articulate what is past', then, 'does not mean to recognize "how it really was"'. It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger'.³⁹

There are at least two ways in which Benjamin speaks of the interruptive/redemptive power of the now of recognizability in 'On the Concept of History'. Dialectics is first a mode of interruption where the present in danger culls from the past for the sake of a present self-understanding. The now is able to present an object, practice or event from the past as exemplary. 'For Robespierre', Benjamin writes, 'Roman antiquity was a past charged with the now, which he exploded out

of the continuum of history. The French revolution thought of itself as a latter-day Rome.⁴⁰ Rome is 'cited' as 'up-to-date' – it speaks to the truth of the present situation in its urgency. It thereby provides a model or guide for action. Second, perhaps more substantially, the now redeems the past by doing justice to the dead.⁴¹ 'There is a secret agreement', Benjamin writes, 'between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that proceeded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim.'⁴² The moment of danger that constitutes the now makes possible interrupting the history of victors by redeeming the oppressed who did not figure in that history and who certainly did not write it.

In both cases, dialectics is resistance. It is a form of interruption that resists the continuum of history – one predicated on forgetting the objects, practices, as well as lives that are deemed to be irrelevant to or whose destruction is justified by the history of the victor. For Benjamin, such interruption requires arrest, nonnarrative presentation, capturing events in a flash. This requires a type of thinking that grasps but does not develop. It juxtaposes and constructs relations among singularities, rather than analysing the development of historical phenomena. Dialectics requires holding together opposites in tension, not in order to see their inner connections or to arrive at a resolution, but to break a reified history and the habits of thought that construct it.⁴³ All of this is the opposite of Hegel's notion of dialectics. And yet it is clear that Benjamin saw the significance of the moment of stasis in Hegel.⁴⁴ He appreciates privileging the speculative moment where thinking comes to a halt in its attempt to grasp historical intelligibility. To be sure, Hegel failed to offer a critical, interruptive model. The moment of stasis in Hegel is a moment of analytic clarity, while for Benjamin it is a contingent construction that may or may not break cultural, political, philosophical reification. And yet, Hegel understood the significance of coming to a standstill.⁴⁵

Adorno

In 'Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel', Adorno makes the following observation:

In its microstructure Hegel's thought and its literary forms are what Walter Benjamin later called 'dialectics at a standstill,' comparable to the experience the eye has when looking through a microscope at a drop of water that begins to teem with life: except that what that stubborn, spellbinding gaze falls on is not firmly delineated as an object but frayed, as it were, at the edges.⁴⁶

Hegel and Benjamin converge on one important point, according to Adorno. Their conceptions of dialectic privilege the moment of stasis. Indeed, as we have seen, they agree on one and only one point: the critical power of dialectical thinking resides in its ability to fix a stubborn gaze on tension, on contradiction. In very different ways, stasis resists positivity and reification. Adorno rejects Hegel's dialectics precisely because of this positive moment. For similar reasons, he criticizes Benjamin's dialectical image as 'not dialectical enough'.⁴⁷ In contrast, Adorno argues that the critical power of dialectics resides in its *inability* to arrive at a standstill. Resistance is possible given the ongoing movement generated by irreducible contradiction.

While the structure of Adorno's negative dialectics is best understood by examining his *Negative Dialectics*, the stakes can be grasped by considering the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (written with Max Horkheimer) and *Minima Moralia*. A dialectic of enlightenment is an exposition of Western rationality that traces the effects of the principle of identity from ancient and modern philosophical and scientific practice to late capitalist commodified culture. Like Hegel in the early 'Spirit' essay, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the structure of Western rationality is mastery.⁴⁸ Quantifiability, calculability and equivalence are principles of order that respond to the impulse to master nature. Mastery helps explain what they call the central theoretical insight of the text: 'Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology'.⁴⁹ Throughout the 'philosophical fragments' that comprise the book, Adorno and Horkheimer trace the way in which myth is always already a form of enlightenment (a way of 'explicating' or 'narrating'), and the ways in which enlightenment is a form of myth (the way in which scientific or bureaucratic rationalization goes unquestioned). The crucial point is that 'equivalence is ... the new fetish' – a fetish that responds to reason's need to master.⁵⁰

Minima Moralia explores this thought from the first person perspective, as a matter of individual experience. As Jay Bernstein succinctly puts it, *Minima Moralia* explores coldness as the 'material inscription of logical indifference'.⁵¹ Coldness is the '*Stimmung* of identity thinking in its exploded bourgeois form.' As 'reflections on a damaged life', *Minima Moralia* is a negativist consideration of ethical action and, as Bernstein puts it, its condition of impossibility. It is a reflection on the conditions that make it impossible to live a life 'rightly'.⁵² Any attempt to be ethical within fundamentally unethical institutions is undermined. *Minima Moralia* is thus a reflection on the structure and logic of concealment that sustains a situation in which 'there is life no longer'.⁵³ It examines habits, practices, institutions (from love, marriage and dwelling to high art and

philosophy) and seeks to present the logic of equivalence that structures them into varieties of coldness. For example, the institution of marriage is distorted from being based on relations of intimacy to being based on economic interests and submission.⁵⁴ It is an institution, Adorno maintains, that institutes and sustains female subordination as an ethical virtue and female economic dependence as a norm. For instance, the dialectic of tact expresses coldness as the material inscription of equivalence within the public realm. A culture of tact reverses the way in which tact arises in a modern context where forms of acknowledgement and respect are not predetermined.⁵⁵ In a commodified culture, tact is a mode of distancing.⁵⁶ It is a way of interacting with another without being engaged. It is a formalism that can only recognize the distance that must be kept in a social space populated by atomistic individuals.

Minima Moralia is exemplary of a negative dialectics in its style and content.⁵⁷ Equivalence is the new fetish, one that masters all institutions, practices, and interactions in their sensuous particularity. Like *Minima Moralia*, which considers a wrong life, one that cannot be lived rightly, *Negative Dialectics* develops the thought that dialectics is 'the ontology of the wrong state of things'.⁵⁸ A critique of idealism is an account of the wrong state of things insofar as 'identity is the primal form of all ideology'.⁵⁹ Tracing the structure of identity in philosophical concepts is crucial, since it allows for an account of a type of thinking that would resist its own 'identitarian' tendencies. *Negative Dialectics* thus articulates a 'philosophical materialism' by pursuing what Adorno calls a 'metacritique' of idealism. Although Hegel is not the only target in this text, Adorno argues that the Hegelian compulsion to identity leads to a defence of totality and finality. Hegel's speculative dialectics suppresses contradiction. It seeks to overcome it in the interest of identity, which makes possible historical closure.⁶⁰ Such suppression only 'perpetuates antagonism', however, given the insatiable character of identity thinking in philosophical, economic, and scientific inquiry and practice.⁶¹

The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is also exemplary of a negative dialectics in its form of critique. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer use reason to criticize reason itself.⁶² Similarly, *Negative Dialectics* uses 'the strength of subjectivity to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity'.⁶³ To think is to identify, Adorno concedes to the idealist tradition (both in the guise of classical German philosophy and in the guise of fundamental ontology and transcendental phenomenology).⁶⁴ Dialectics, then, is necessarily beholden to identity. A negative dialectics, however, begins from the categories of identity best articulated by idealism and breaks the compulsion to identity from within. A

negative dialectics progresses in the form of an immanent critique. 'Objectively', Adorno indeed writes, 'dialectics means to break the compulsion to identity, and to break it by means of the energy stored up in that compulsion and congealed in its objectifications'.⁶⁵ A negative dialectics must thus seek to 'correct itself in its critical course'.⁶⁶ It must be a 'reflection of its own motion'.⁶⁷

A philosophical materialism, Adorno argues in *Negative Dialectics*, is a materialist dialectic. Adorno seeks to develop a materialist dialectics by privileging what he calls the nonidentical (*Nichtidentischen*). In the introduction to the book, Adorno argues that dialectics is 'the consistent sense of nonidentity'.⁶⁸ It moves on the basis of contradiction, given that 'contradiction is nonidentity under the aspect of identity'.⁶⁹ To think is to identify because to think is to judge – to apply a concept that makes possible the determinacy of any given in sensation. This Kantian model of cognition is central to the notion of the nonidentical. Although concepts identify an object by subsuming its sensuous particularity under a universal concept, 'objects', Adorno argues, 'do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder'.⁷⁰ The irreducible 'preponderance of the object', Adorno famously proposes, should compel us to resist the compulsion to identity. Things are given in themselves in an 'indirect' way. They retain their integrity as that to which 'all logical propositions refer even when they are free to ignore it entirely'.⁷¹ To abstract or subsume is to abstract from or subsume under x or y. The concept therefore necessarily depends on the object. Negative dialectics resist identity thinking when it strives to say 'what something is'.⁷² Identity thinking is invested in saying 'what something comes under'. Negative dialectics, then, follows a 'logic of disintegration' – a logic of the *untruth* of the identity of the subject and the object.⁷³ It is a logic, in other words, of the untruth of identity.

Negative dialectics, then, is a form of thinking that is 'suspicious of all identity'.⁷⁴ Given its irreducible entanglement with identity, however, a negative dialectics is nothing but thought's reflection on its own activity. It resists its slippage into identity thinking when it knows that it necessarily functions with identity and moves towards the unattainable goal of totality. Negative dialectics therefore resists identity thinking by *knowing* that the 'whole is the false'.⁷⁵ It is, Adorno says, 'the self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion'.⁷⁶ Indeed, 'the surplus over the subject', he argues, '... and the element of truth in reity – these two extremes touch in the idea of truth'.⁷⁷ Now, recall that for Adorno the critical power of dialectics resides in its *inability* to arrive at a standstill. Dialectical thinking in a negative key can never arrive at a moment of full transparency and rest (Hegel). It can never arrive at a standstill (Benjamin).

'It lies in the definition of negative dialectics,' Adorno writes, 'that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total.'⁷⁸ Negative dialectics purports to comprehend the truth of late capitalist modernity *in its contradictions*, disavowing that such insight requires a type of thinking that arrives at a moment of rest. Dialectics is a form of resistance in Adorno, then, insofar as it can exhibit the contradictions of Western rationality, commodified culture, and Western philosophical categories in their restless movement.

Negative dialectics is thus a form of thinking that can exhibit the dialectical reversals that necessarily follow from identity thinking, from the fact that identity has become the ordering principle of all areas of social life. Unlike Benjamin's dialectical image, negative dialectics is a form of resistance given that it can exhibit the *transitions* between contradictions, the dialectical reversals distinctive of late capitalist modern life. But it is properly a form of resistance if, unlike Hegel, it interrupts the compulsion to finality, to transparency. Negative dialectics is thus an analytic-synthetic mode of thought that tracks dialectical reversal, yet it is used to construct constellations that can exhibit such reversals expressed by particular habits, practices, or institutions. In resisting the moment of stasis, negative dialectics subjects itself to the same dialectical treatment to which it subjects Western rationality, commodified culture and philosophical concepts. Note, however, that in exhibiting dialectical reversal and in arguing that it itself never comes to a halt, negative dialectics cannot but help arrive at a standstill. As Gillian Rose puts it, 'Adorno's judgment tries to prevent the Bacchanalian revelers from collapsing with exhaustion so that while he judges "No repose!" – and thereby reposes illicitly, making an exception of himself – we continue gabbling about "stones and coals".'⁷⁹ Whether a paradoxical consequence of negative dialectics or a philosophical inconsistency on Adorno's part, the work of negative dialectics gives an account of itself, one that comprehends its own tendencies and promotes resistance to such tendencies.

Dialectics as resistance

In this chapter, I have reconstructed Hegel's speculative dialectics, Benjamin's dialectical image and Adorno's negative dialectics arguing that they ought to be understood as forms of resistance. These three models of dialectics articulate modes of thinking that resist the positivity or reification distinctive of capitalist modernity. For all three thinkers, dialectics resists modes of thought that not only express but also sustain a specific type of forgetting – bonds of life and

love, or nature and social life (Hegel); objects, experiences, lives destroyed by ‘world-historical’ development (Benjamin); the sensuous particularity of objects, subjects, forms of life (Adorno). These three models cannot be reduced to one another, as should be clear. They express incompatible philosophical views. What they share, however, is an investment in dialectics as an inherently critical-interruptive mode of thought. They share the view that dialectical thinking is a practice – not just a form of critique but also a form of interruption. This is nothing less than the legacy of Hegel in Benjamin and Adorno’s thought, one that invites us to reflect on the status of dialectics in critical theory today.

Notes

- 1 I assess each model looking at, as Adorno put it, the ‘fusion of the dynamic moment with the static’. See Adorno, ‘Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel’, in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).
- 2 Hegel, ‘Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate’, in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. TM Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).
- 3 See, for example, Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (London: Blackwell, 1992).
- 4 See Hegel, ‘Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate’, e.g., 184ff., 212ff. and 229ff.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 182ff.
- 6 Jay Bernstein, ‘Love and Law: Hegel’s Critique of Morality’, *Social Research* 70.2 (2003).
- 7 Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 91.
- 8 ‘What reason opposes,’ Hegel writes, ‘is just the absolute fixity which the intellect gives to the dichotomy; and it does so all the more if the absolute opposites themselves originate in reason’ (*ibid.*).
- 9 It is important to note that, in all its abstraction, this is also what animates Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. In the Foreword to the Subjective Logic, for example, Hegel argues that the task at hand is to make ‘fluid again’, to ‘revive the concept in such a dead matter’ examined in the Objective Logic. Indeed, Hegel’s discussions of dialectics in the *Logic* (the most important of which is the discussion in the closing chapter of the *Logic*, ‘The Absolute Idea’) are responses to the dualisms of critical and post-critical thought. See my *Hegel’s Theory of Intelligibility* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015) for an extended reading of the *Logic* and its relation to the *Phenomenology*.
- 10 See the instructive discussion of the three moments of thought in EL §§80–82. See also Gillian Rose, ‘From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking: Hegel and Adorno’, in *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays* (London: Blackwell, 1993).

- 11 See Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005), 94ff.
- 12 Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (Humanities Press, 1981), 48–9.
- 13 Exemplary of the moment of stasis in Hegel's thought are the endings to his major works. The *Phenomenology* ends with the figure of absolute knowing, the *Logic* ends with the figure of the absolute idea, and the *Encyclopedia* ends with the figure of absolute *Geist*. They are moments of recollection in which Hegel reflects on the mode of advance throughout the individual work or the system as a whole. They do not present a substantive view of the treatment of modernity, in the case of the *Phenomenology*, or Western metaphysics, in the case of the *Logic*. They assess methodological features of that treatment. See my *Hegel's Theory of Intelligibility*.
- 14 This issue is central to the *Logic*, and discussed explicitly in the discussion of the absolute idea as absolute method. See my *Hegel's Theory of Intelligibility* for a detailed account of these passages.
- 15 Cf. my 'Hegel's Legacy', in *Continental Philosophy: What and Where Will It Be?* ed. Ted Toadvine, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50.2 (2012).
- 16 Walter Benjamin, 'The Life of Students', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Bellknap Press, 2004).
- 17 Benjamin writes that 'the elements of the final state are not evidently present as formless progressive tendencies, but are deeply embedded in every present moment as the most vulnerable, defamed, ridiculed creations and thoughts. To shape the immanent state of perfection clearly as absolute, to make it visible and dominant in the present, is the historical task' ('The Life of Students', 37).
- 18 See T.W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Henri Lonitz (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 321.
- 19 See Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), chap. 6. See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eilan and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Bellknap Press, 1999); and 'The Storyteller', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Press, 1969).
- 20 Benjamin, 'The Life of Students', 38.
- 21 Cf. María del Rosario Acosta's insightful 'Storytelling and the Unforgettable: Reflections on Language, Trauma, and Memory in Light of Walter Benjamin's "The Storyteller"', ms.
- 22 My thanks to Bart Zantvoort for this formulation.
- 23 The models are the Platonic Idea, the Adamic Name, the Goethean Idea and the notion of constellation. For an excellent discussion of Benjamin's commitment to a Kantian notion of representation, see Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998).

- 24 See Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1998), 175ff. for a discussion of the relation between idea and concept in Benjamin and Adorno's critique.
- 25 Benjamin, 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009), 34. Benjamin continues: 'The objective interpretation of phenomena – of their elements – determines their relation to each other.'
- 26 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Convolute N3,3; 7a,5; 10a,2 and 3; 11,4.
- 27 Ibid., N10a3.
- 28 Benjamin adds that '[w]here thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions, there the dialectical image appears'. Indeed, this arrest is 'found where the tensions between dialectical opposites is greatest' (ibid.).
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 As Adorno writes:

The purpose of producing this history is not a recovery of the past. Benjamin views this approach as the 'strongest narcotic of the century' (AP N3, 4). Rather, Benjamin's intention is to liberate 'the enormous energies that are bound up in the "once upon a time" of classical historiography' (AP N3, 4). Two goals are intertwined in this intention: the first aims at the awakening of modernity from the dream world into which it has plunged; the second aims at a total reconception of the way history is both written and understood.

See 'A Portrait of Walter Benjamin', in *Prisms*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Samuel Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

- 31 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N3, 1.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., N1,21. Benjamin adds that 'Hegelian dialectic knows time solely as the properly historical, if not psychological, time of thinking. The time differential in which alone the dialectical image is real is still unknown to him.' Hegel's inability to think time as differential results in a progressivist conception of history.
- 34 See Hannah Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin 1892–1940', in *Illuminations*.
- 35 Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Concept of History*, in *Illuminations*, thesis XVII.
- 36 See ibid., theses XI, XII and XIII.
- 37 Ibid., thesis XVI.
- 38 Ibid., thesis XVIII.
- 39 Ibid., thesis VI.
- 40 Ibid., thesis XIV.
- 41 'The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption', Benjamin writes (thesis II). See Matthias Fritsch's exemplary *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006) for a full discussion of this second suggestion.

- 42 Benjamin, 'Theses on the Concept of History', thesis II.
- 43 See Benjamin's comments on the process of thinking as 'pausing for breaths', as 'irregular rhythm' in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', 28.
- 44 Benjamin writes: 'To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts' (*The Arcades Project*, N10a3).
- 45 Benjamin also notes: 'Reread Hegel on dialectics at a standstill', and 'Dialectical image and dialectics at a standstill in Hegel'. This thesis would require elaboration for which I have no space this chapter.
- 46 Adorno, 'Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel', 133. He repeats this in *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Bloomsbury, 1981), 157.
- 47 See Adorno and Benjamin, *Complete Correspondence*, 131, where Adorno suggests that Benjamin's assessment of art requires 'more dialectics'. See also Karen Feldman, 'Not Dialectical Enough: On Benjamin, Adorno, and Autonomous Critique', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 44, no. 4 (2011).
- 48 'Enlightenment understood as the advance of thought', Adorno and Horkheimer write, 'has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters'.
- 49 T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), xvi.
- 50 Ibid., 12.
- 51 Jay Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 402.
- 52 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.N.F. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2006): A 'wrong life cannot be lived rightly', §18.
- 53 The full quote reads: 'Our perspective of life has passed into an ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer' (ibid., §12).
- 54 Ibid., §§10–11.
- 55 As Bernstein puts it: 'The moment of tact is the moment when thick concepts lost their religious metaphysical and political anchoring but were still available as forms of action and perception' (*Disenchantment and Ethics*, 65).
- 56 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §16.
- 57 See Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of TW Adorno* (London: Verso, 2014).
- 58 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 11.
- 59 Ibid., 148.
- 60 For Adorno's critique of positive negation, see *Negative Dialectics*, 158ff.
- 61 Ibid., 142.
- 62 As Simon Jarvis has convincingly argued in *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, in the final analysis, Adorno and Horkheimer's point is that enlightenment is not

enlightened enough. Enlightenment must 'assimilate its regressive moment' for otherwise 'it seals its own fate'. What is more, they maintain that the 'self-destruction of the enlightenment' must be analysed in light of a 'necessary admission': 'that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking' (xvi). As I read Adorno and Horkheimer, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* employs reason (account giving) to criticize reason itself (account giving as mastery). It thereby presents the entanglement of reason and domination.

63 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, xx.

64 Ibid., 5.

65 Ibid., 157. See also: 'Dialectics as a philosophical mode of procedure is the attempt to untie the knot of paradoxicality by the oldest means of the enlightenment: the ruse' (141).

66 With it, the subject must 'see reason against its reason' (ibid., 148).

67 Ibid., 141.

68 Ibid., 5.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., 184.

72 Ibid., 149.

73 Ibid., 145.

74 Ibid.

75 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §29.

76 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 406.

77 Ibid., 375.

78 Ibid., 406.

79 Rose, 'From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking', 63.

Part Two

Nature and Spirit

The Spirit of Resistance and Its Fate

Howard Caygill

What place does resistance (*Widerstand*) occupy in the Hegelian system? According to the *letter* of Hegel's work, a very specific and limited one, confined to the analysis of the play of forces and the laws of mechanism. Yet the *spirit* of resistance – technically inadmissible given the external character of the mechanical relation – is barely contained within these confines. It is the elusive motor of the section on 'Force and the Understanding' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and serves to vivify the formal definition of resistance presented in the *Science of Logic*. These episodes point beyond themselves to a larger and perhaps not fully recognized spirit of resistance at work throughout Hegel's system. They testify to another force at work, one that resists the *mise-en-scène* of *Aufhebung* that casts the absolute alongside freedom and the infinite in a drama of speculation. For while Hegelian resistance always appears on the stage of finite opposition, restricted to an apparently minor role in the Newtonian opposition of mechanical forces, it consistently points beyond mechanism and the external opposition of forces to a thinking of actuality that intractably recoils from any pretention to think the absolute.

The episode 'Force and the Understanding' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is well known as the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness but is perhaps not properly recognized as a meditation upon resistance, with implications pointing beyond the opposition of forces that characterize the laws of mechanics. It shows Hegel appealing to infinity as a *deus ex machina* in order to break out of the opposition of resistance and counter-resistance working itself through the play of active and reactive force. It also obscurely indicates the reason for this appeal, which is the need to move from the modal posture of actuality to those of possibility and necessity. This movement is revealed as the *telos* of the chapter of mechanism in the *Science of Logic* that, moving from force to law, arrives at an explicit declaration of 'free necessity'. It is here that Hegel states

his formal definition of resistance, in the first chapter of the second section, on 'Objectivity', of the 'Subjective Logic or the Doctrine of the Notion' in the *Science of Logic*.¹ Although located in a seemingly mundane and little-studied section of the *Science of Logic*, the definition has a number of properties that point beyond the understanding of resistance as an aspect of the spiritless 'external relation' that usually characterizes the 'mechanical' in Hegel. Prominent among these is Hegel's use of a vocabulary of violence (*Gewalt*), power (*Macht*) and fate (*Schicksal*) that clearly points beyond the discussion of physical mechanism.

In both cases, resistance is revealed in the process of its suppression, accomplished in the departure from the modal stance of actuality to an alliance of necessity and freedom. There remains, however, a lingering suspicion that this fate of resistance is ordained externally, that the move from the actual opposition of forces that constitutes resistance to a self-legislating *revolutionary* subject/substance is the outcome of a prior decision. The elusive and equivocal manifestations of resistance in Hegel's major works may be traced to this decision, which orders the overcoming and suppression of resistance. While it is largely taken for granted in the relegation of resistance to mechanism, the origins of this decision can be traced to his early writings on Christianity, the matrix of Hegel's thought, where the theme of resistance arises at crucial moments of argumentative decision offering an alternative or supplement to the nascent speculative dialectic.

Hegel's early writings on classical culture, Judaism and Christianity attest not only to the presence of a spirit of resistance in his work but also allow a reassessment of its place in the system. Is it the fate of resistance to become a moment successfully surpassed by speculative dialectic – as seems Hegel's intent when he locates it in the discussions of mechanism and thus denies it both spirit and fate – or does it resist, remain to trouble and develop a certain immunity to dialectical capture? Can the possibility be excluded, even within the system, that spirit is necessarily resistant, that it is always the spirit of resistance and as such the fundamental, unsurpassable but suppressed condition of the freedom, infinity and thought of the absolute widely thought to condition and exceed it? Should this seem remotely plausible, then the actuality of resistance threatens to disrupt any actualizing of the alliance of freedom and necessity by means of the infinite that is the destiny of the system. The ambivalent attempts to force resistance into the confines of the discussions of mechanism evident in 'Force and the Understanding' and the definition in the *Science of Logic* then assume a new significance as evidence for the spirit and the fate of resistance under the hostile regime of speculation.²

The force of resistance

The section 'Force and the Understanding' seems to mark a crucial transition from 'Consciousness' to 'Self-Consciousness' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* but also serves to consign the claims of force and law to the outer limits of consciousness, thus clearing the way for an untroubled move to self-consciousness. Hegel tilts the argument in his favour at the outset by situating force within the 'unconditioned universal', which will contain both active and reactive force and which almost by definition allows him to see 'the passivity that is a being for another' and the 'being for self' as 'essentially self-superseding aspects' posited in their mutual transition (PS 81). For the latter is effectively a declaration – at the outset of the discussion of force – of the dissolution of resistance. Although unnamed, resistance remains at stake throughout Hegel's description of the acrobatics of force: it is 'posited as one', then expresses itself when solicited by an external 'other' that turns out to have always been force itself. These movements describe the workings of a resistance that is constituted as a 'universal medium' in which active and reactive force appear as 'vanishing moments' (PS 83). When Hegel writes that 'the interplay of the two forces thus consists in their being determined as mutually opposed, in their being for one another in this determination' (PS 84), this could stand as a definition of resistance, and indeed leads with little transition to a deduction of the actuality of force. However, unlike his contemporary Clausewitz, who elaborated this actuality into a philosophy of war as resistance, Hegel seeks to overcome it by dissolving resistance in order to make room for the alliance of necessity and freedom made possible by the notion of the infinite.

The movement beyond the play of resistant forces requires the prior disabling of resistance, and so the 'truth of force' in the thought of force is cast as a transition from force to law: 'the moments of [force's] actuality, their substance and their movement, collapse unresistingly into an undifferentiated unity, a unity which is not force driven back into itself (for this is only such a moment), but its *Notion qua Notion*' (PS 86). The suspension of resistance is preemptory, to say the least, but it is necessary to convert force as the source of law into force as its servant. Hegel is hastening the passage to self-consciousness – force and its resistance are but the 'developed negative' whose truth is 'the positive, viz. the *universal*, the object that, *in itself*, possesses being' (PS 87). Of course, positivity is as problematic a category as the negative in Hegel, and will take us to the abstract opposition of the sensuous and supersensible worlds, but what

is most important for him at this point is to leave behind the scenario of the resistant and reciprocally determining forces that make up actuality. In their place emerges the force of law and resistance to the law. And although resistant force returns, it comes only to offer a show of resistance, for the reciprocal and unresolvable force of actual resistance is purged and replaced by a law of force or the 'difference which remains constantly selfsame' (PS 96). The actuality of resistant force is translated into the world and its inversion (*Verkehrung*) – action in the former is reaction in the latter, where reaction is already action. Resistance in the finite world of actuality here metamorphoses into a distinction between this world and its inversion.

Hegel's examples of this process of inversion range from the opposition of sweet and sour, black and white, positive and negative magnetic and electrical charges to vengeance and punishment. But what is most important is that these differences are not mere opposites but stand in a dynamic relation to each other: 'a repulsion of the selfsame from itself, and likeness of the unlike as unlike' (PS 99). Hegel understands this dynamic in terms of the Fichtean *Anstoß*, translated by Miller as repulsion, but rather than showing that *Anstoßen* is a mode of resistance – negation appearing as position or what is described immediately after as the 'opposite of an opposite' – Hegel suddenly suspends it in the 'absolute notion'. While he intimates the complex topology of resistance as both active and reactive force – 'it is itself and its opposite in one unity' (PS 99) – this description leads not to further reflection on the peculiar properties of resistance but to an upward gaze into infinity. This infinity is far from innocent, since it becomes the means through which 'law completes itself into an immanent necessity' (PS 99); it effectively brokers the transition from the actuality of opposed force to the necessity of law. Hegel then presents properties of resistance as if they were properties of the infinite: the duplication of force that follows from 'the selfsame which repels itself from itself or sunders itself into two' characteristic of actual resistance is infinitized and converted into the necessity of law. In this way, resistance or the doubling of force into action and reaction is stabilized and brought under law, while preserving the possibility that the differences 'can stimulate each other into activity' (PS 99), a stimulus without which everything would grind to a law-abiding halt.

The beautiful but suspiciously rhetorical apostrophe to infinity that immediately follows in 'Force and the Understanding' seems designed to disarm any suspicion that this was always and already the pre-intended destination of the argument: 'This simple infinity, or the absolute notion, may be called

the simple essence of life, the soul of the world, the universal blood, whose omnipresence is neither disturbed nor interrupted by any difference, but rather is itself every difference, as also their supersession; it pulsates within itself but does not move, vibrates, yet is at rest' (PS 100). Once Hegel is sure that the infinite has filled the field of vision, distracting both natural and philosophical consciousness, he can admit that it had always been there from the start. This principle of method, however, conceals a prior and unthematized decision to move from the actuality of force and resistance to the infinite and the absolute notion. Yet, the move from actuality to necessity does not convincingly establish its own necessity. In a key sentence without which the entire phenomenological movement would stall, Hegel writes: 'Appearance, or the play of forces, already displays it [infinity] [*stellt sie selbst schon da*] but it is as explanation that it first freely stands forth; and in being finally an object of consciousness, *as that which it is*, consciousness is thus *self-consciousness*' (PS 101). But perhaps it is 'already' there because Hegel took a decision to plant it in advance. The resistance or 'unrest of pure self-movement' does not have to be infinite in order to disturb fixed determinations, nor must the transition to self-consciousness pass ineluctably through infinity. The passage to self-consciousness can be effected from within actuality through the movements of resistance and counter-resistance – there is no inherent necessity to proceed to the infinite. The passage through infinity is required only in order to effect a change in modality, to move from actuality to necessity and ultimately (although this is not explicitly stated in 'Force and the Understanding') to 'free necessity'. For as Hegel provisionally concludes, the movement through which law posits unified force and force a unified law is 'necessity'.

Resistance is implied and denied throughout 'Force and the Understanding'. It appears within the actuality of force with active and reactive force each resisting the other. It can also be glimpsed in the relation between law and force, with law anticipating the resistance of the individual and the individual that of law. But the constitutive and unsurpassable role played by resistance is occluded by the appeal to the infinite. The infinite serves to convert actuality into necessity (and later in the progress of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* into possibility, for the infinite is a property of the idea of freedom). However, the relationship between resistance and the infinite remains unanalysed, perhaps because of an assumed imperative to derive the necessity of law from freedom, a movement alien to resistance and its place in the actuality of opposed forces.³

Resistance and 'free necessity' in the Science of Logic

In contrast to 'Force and the Understanding', where the properties of actual resistant forces are surreptitiously transferred to the infinite, the *Science of Logic* is altogether more explicit. It not only proposes a formal definition of *Widerstand* but also explicitly declares its overcoming in a new actuality of revolutionary self-legislation or 'free necessity'. The discussion is located in the chapter on 'Mechanism', the inconspicuous heart of the 'Logic of the Notion' following the logics of Being and Essence.⁴ It is to be found in the centre of the section on 'Objectivity', which follows 'Subjectivity' and precedes 'The Idea', as a part of the section on 'The Mechanical Process' framed by 'The Mechanical Object' and 'Absolute Mechanism'. It there forms part of 'The Real Mechanical Process' between 'The Formal Mechanical Process' and 'The Product of the Mechanical Process'. It is thus to be found at the centre of the most highly mediated account of immediacy to be found in the entire *Science of Logic*. This crucial but seemingly remote systemic location is at the extreme limit of the inextricable nexus of immediacy and mediacy pursued throughout the *Science of Logic*. It is an extreme point where the familiar distinctions of subject, object and relation almost lose all their purchase; resistance; in short, explicitly appears at the extreme limit of the *Logic* as both an outcome and condition to be surpassed. This may account for the extreme volatility of the definition and the formulations that prepare and succeed it but also for the critical role played by resistance in sustaining the movement out of mediated immediacy towards life and the absolute idea with which the *Science of Logic* closes.⁵

The chapter on mechanism departs from a 'mediation that has collapsed into immediate identity' (SL 712) and that leads to the contradiction (*Widerspruch*) between 'the complete mutual *indifference* of the objects and the *identity* of their *determinateness* or the contradiction of their complete *externality* in the *identity* of their determinateness' (SL 714). We are in the realm of external mechanical relation, where objects are both indifferent to other objects and yet bound to them by force and law. Yet, and consistent with the phenomenological method of the *Science of Logic*, this is only in appearance, since 'theoretical or practical mechanism cannot take place without its self-activity, without an impulse and consciousness, yet there is lacking in it the freedom of individuality, and because this freedom is not manifest in it such action appears as a merely external one' (SL 711). The transition in this sentence, however, is effected with great haste, since mechanical externality is derived from the *absence* of freedom without any prior evidence for freedom being necessarily present at the outset. The

claim that the coappearance of immediacy and mediacy discloses an immanent process that disrupts immediacy, a process figured in terms of the monad that is immediate and closed upon itself ('windowless') but also open to and limited by others through mirroring and other mechanical operations, coheres without any reference to the postulate of freedom. In the section on 'The Formal Mechanical Process' this immediate mediacy is figured in terms of *Mitteilung* or communication, but it is one accomplished *freely*, or more precisely, *without resistance*: '*Spiritual communication*, which moreover takes place within that element which is the universal in the form of universality, is explicitly an ideal relation in which a *determinateness continues* itself from one person into another unimpaired, and universalizes itself without any alternation whatever – as a scent freely spreads in the unresisting atmosphere (*widerstandlosen Atmosphäre*)' (SL 716). This mediated immediacy is characterized less by the presence of freedom than by the absence of resistance, its relegation from any involvement with spirit, but it risks bringing everything to a halt in an atmosphere of fragrant immediacy.

The absence of resistance is indeed constitutive of the perfumed repose or perpetual peace of the untroubled immediate universal that Hegel conjures up for us at this point of the *Science of Logic*. Yet this mechanical utopia of the senses is destined to be overcome, leaving only a trace of the scent of absolute knowing; but the fantasy of an actuality from which resistance has withdrawn will be carried over into subsequent moments, always under the unproved assumption that absence of resistance equates with the presence of freedom. Hegel executes this movement in 'The Formal Mechanical Process' in terms of the 'universal in and for itself' or the '*objective as such*' (SL 716). This state of absorption by the universal is found 'both in the spiritual and in the material sphere; against which the individuality of outer objects as well as of persons is an unessential element that can offer it no resistance (*das ihm kein Widerstand leisten kann*)' (SL 716). The universal as medium is constituted by the absence of resistance in both its spiritual and material aspects. Hegel continues to extend his argument from the realm of nature to that of spirit proper: 'Laws, morals, rational conceptions in general, are in the spiritual sphere such communicable entities which penetrate individuals in an unconscious manner and exert their influence on them. In the material sphere the communicable entities are motion, heat, magnetism, electricity and the like.' (SL 716). In these cases, individuals are absorbed into their mediums as particulars, a movement he describes in terms of two processes – 'the raising of the individual determinateness into universality in communication, and the particularisation of it, or the reduction of what was solely a one to a species, in distribution, [that] are one and the same' (SL 717).

In both cases what occurs is a neutralization of resistance, one that should be distinguished rigorously from its successful supersession.

The distinction between the neutralization of resistance – achieving *Widerstandslosigkeit* – and its overcoming or sublation is critical for Hegel's view of the universal as medium that is developed in the following section of the *System of Logic*, on 'The Real Mechanical Process.' In the immediate run-up to the definition of resistance, Hegel attempts to describe the actuality of resistance in terms of the external relations between objects arrested in a universal medium. Absorbed in the medium, individual objects nevertheless discover 'a *self-subsistence* that is *impenetrable self-subsistence* for other objects', it is one that leads to 'this more specific opposition of *self-subsistent individuality* and a universal that lacks *self-subsistence*' (SL 719). The last steps towards the definition of the resistance that now seems to be emerging between objects in the decaying universal medium pass by way of the real mechanical process of communication. This is no longer governed by the universal medium, but rather through inequalities arising between objects defined by their degree of 'self-subsistence'. However, these inequalities are not simply defined in terms of mutual resistance but also provide the terms through which resistance will come to be defined; resistance, in short, has the important property of appearing as at once prior and posterior to its actions.⁶

In his description of the real mechanical process, Hegel works with a distinction between a resistance of strength and one of weakness, seeing the latter, paradoxically, as being more effective. The weaker can only communicate with the stronger if it enters into a common sphere or medium of communication with it: 'The *weaker* can be seized and penetrated by the *stronger* only in so far as it accepts the latter and constitutes one sphere with it' (SL 719). Once within this sphere or shared medium it can of course engage in resistance, but this presumes a prior failure of resistance to even entering the shared sphere in the first place. The prior resistance is explored through a series of analogies ranging from ballistics to zoology:

Just as in the material sphere the weak is secured against the disproportionately strong (as a sheet hanging free in the air is not pierced by a musket ball, or a weak organic receptivity is less susceptible to strong, than to weak, stimuli), so the wholly feeble spirit is safer from the strong spirit than one that stands nearer to the strong. Imagine if you like someone quite dull-witted and ignoble, then on such a person lofty intelligence and nobility can make no impression. The only consistent defence *against* reason is to have no dealings with it at all. Where the object that is not self-subsistent cannot make contact with one that is and no communication can take place between them, the latter can also offer no *resistance*, that is, cannot specify the communicated universal for itself. (SL 719)

The resistance of the weak seems to yield a paradox rather than material for supersession. But as will become evident in Hegel's controversial reading of the 'fate' of Judaism, such resistance to 'communication' with self-subsistent others is not without its risks, and prior resistance can as easily fall to its fate as rise to dialectical supersession.

The resistance of the weak consists in not entering into a common medium or sphere with the stronger, thus neutralizing the strength of the stronger by not, in so many words, engaging in a battle of recognition but in refusing any shared ground or recognition. The bullet cannot penetrate the sheet that resists by refusing to resist it, the weak in spirit are oblivious to the strength of the stronger and thus resist them the more effectively than if they tried to be as strong or stronger, and the object that is not self-subsistent resists the self-subsistent not on the terrain of self-subsistency but by refusing to enter that terrain. For the self-subsistent, in the face of the indifference of the former, is defenceless and can offer no resistance to the latter's absence of resistance.

Not only the ancient Hebrews participated in the prior resistance of refusing to enter a shared terrain of resistance and struggle. The Gandhian, originally Christian, practice of *ahimsa* or nonviolence relies on the power of the weak to resist through the refusal to participate in resistance on the oppressor's terms. This is clearly intimated in Hegel's discussion of the Sermon on the Mount and his view of Jesus' refusal to resist particular laws as a general indifference to law. Hegel regards resistance to law as opposed to resistance within the law as one of the origins of the resistance he examined earlier in terms of the Christian refusal to lend recognition to the Roman Empire. Confronting the paradox of a resistance all the more powerful for not engaging in a struggle for recognition on a shared terrain finally brings him to his attempt to contrive a formal definition of resistance.

Hegel formally defines resistance as 'the precise moment of the overpowering [*Überwältigung*] of the one object by the other, for it is the incipient moment of the distribution of the communicated universal and of the positing of the self-related negativity, of the individuality to be established' (SL 720). Resistance is here described in terms of an object overpowering the resistance of the other in two steps, first by means of bringing it into a common sphere and then vanquishing it according to the terms of the common sphere. Hegel then reiterates the claim that such 'resistance is itself overpowered' when the other object refuses to enter the proffered common sphere, 'where the determinateness of the object is inadequate to the communicated universal that has been taken up by the object and is supposed to individualize itself within it' (SL 720). Hegel

returns to the resistance that is prior to the resistance provoked by a struggle for recognition: 'The object's relative lack of self-subsistence manifests itself in the fact that its *individuality* lacks the *capacity* for what is *communicated* and therefore is disrupted by it, because it cannot constitute itself as a subject in this universal, or make this latter its predicate' (SL 720). Here, resistance appears in the guise of both the object that resists becoming a subject – the sheet with respect to the bullet – and a subject resisting another subject in terms of a shared universal medium. Hegel then reaffirms that there is a resistance that is prior to and perhaps a condition of the second or posterior resistance posed in terms of the shared universal.

At this point, Hegel's lexicon undergoes drastic change as his discussion tips into one of violence and power – *Gewalt* and *Macht*. When an 'object' can or will not assume the shared universal and be constituted as a 'subject' on its terms then violence will be exercised upon it as 'something alien [*fremdes*] to it' (SL 720). Violence (*Gewalt*) is thus associated with the first or prior resistance. Power (*Macht*) on the other hand is exercised when an object enters the universal medium, when it is able to constitute itself as a subject for another subject; if it remains outside or is excluded from the universal medium – characterized, it should be remembered, by reciprocity and recognition – then *Macht* will mutate into *Gewalt*. This is in no respect an *Aufhebung*, but rather what Hegel describes as an immediate or more specifically an unreflected negativity: 'What turns power (*Macht*) into *violence* (*Gewalt*) is this, that though power, an objective universality, is *identical* with the *nature* of the object, its determinateness or negativity is not its own *negative reflection* into itself by which it is an individual' (SL 720). For Hegel, resistance to power *within* the universal medium is formative, it leads to a determinate negation that constitutes the resistant as a subject. This formative or constitutional resistance is conducted legally in terms of the universal – the previously cited objective universality of 'laws, morals, rational conceptions in general' (SL 716). Resistance to power from outside the objective universal is no longer a question of power or the struggle for and within power, but violence; and for Hegel this violence does not issue in a formative struggle or reflected negation that can effect the emergence of a (political) subject, but only in annihilation – it can have no result: 'In so far as the negativity of the object is not reflected into itself in the power, and the power is not the object's own self-relation, it is, as against the power, only *abstract* negativity whose manifestation is extinction' (SL 720). If the resistant refuses to accept what would later be termed by Max Weber, in a tacit return to Kant, the *legitimacy* of power and refuses to participate in legitimate resistance, then it is literally outside the pale

of law, morals and rationality and will encounter them as a violence dedicated to its annihilation.

Hegel begins the following paragraph by defining the distinction between power and violence as fate: 'Power, as *objective universality* and as violence directed *against* the object, what is called *fate*.' (SL 720). Fate is a subjection to violence unique to self-conscious beings; beings without self-consciousness 'have no fate; what befalls them is a contingency ... the alien power of fate is nothing but their own *immediate nature*, externality and contingency itself' (SL 720). Fate, however, belongs to self-conscious beings who refuse to be contained by and to act according to the structures of recognition of power and, by thus refusing, expose themselves to its violence. Hegel sets himself to arguing that self-conscious beings are capable of ceasing to be the objects of fate and of becoming its subject by entering into the objective medium of power. Resistance to power in order to avoid the descent into violence must ultimately enter into complicity and become subject to that power. Resistance to the law, morals and reason must become legal, moral and rational resistance. Hegel's first argumentative step towards this conclusion is to show that resistance to power always already implies a relation to power and that resistance is a mode of this relation: 'Only self-consciousness has a fate in the proper meaning of the word, because it is *free* and therefore in the *individuality* of its ego possesses a being that is absolutely *in and for itself* and can oppose itself to the objective universal and *estrangle* itself from it' (SL 720). The estrangement can be relative or absolute – it can remain consistent with the objective universal even while resisting it, in which case it is complicit with the exercise of power or it absolutely estranges itself from the objective universal and enters the realm of violence.

Hegel is sceptical about the possibility of a sustained absolute estrangement, since he accepts the essentially reactive posture of resistance. The resistant deed contains within it a recognition – at whatever extreme of negativity – of the 'objective universal' it combats. Hegel tries to imagine the absolute (passive) resistance of a 'people without deeds' (SL 721), but concludes that such a people would not be a resistant subject, but purely actual, an object 'without blame' because freedom is not an issue for it. This thought heralds the concluding section of the chapter on 'Absolute Mechanism', which almost exclusively focuses on the resistant power immanent to a structure of recognition and overlooks the resistant violence opposed to the entire structure as such. In the context of power and recognition fate becomes 'rational' or freely chosen, a 'universal that particularizes itself from within' (SL 721). As intimated in 'Force and the Understanding', rational fate is in fact law, and from this point forward resistance

is always within the law and no longer resistance to law as such. And, as in 'Force and the Understanding', this step corresponds to a modal shift, there to necessity but here to an explicit, freely determined necessity.

Hegel frames his description with reference to the solar system and its heliocentric disposition of forces. Resistance is not so much between individuals – by analogy the planets – as between individuals and the 'centre' or, by analogy, the planets and the sun. Subjection to the law of the centre – in terms of the analogy it is the planets subject to the laws of the sun's gravity – is now the given state of the mechanical system, and 'friction, or whatever other form resistance takes, is only a phenomenon of *centrality*.' (SL 722). It is a phenomenon that is both mechanical and physical as well as 'spiritual' and which concerns the subjection of the individual within the 'universal power' (there is no longer any talk of resistant violence) of the centre. The centre is explicitly identified with 'government' to which the singulars or 'individual citizens' are subjected, thus 'transposing their ethical essence into the extreme of actuality' (SL 724). What is actualized is the relation between the centre and the singulars, one that is expressed in the law which will later be presented as the product of freedom. Also implicated in this are the needs of the citizens: these are not satisfied by mere private exchange relations by property owners in a market, but within the 'universal absolute individuality' of the relation between government and citizens. Hegel then takes the final step that supposedly breaks with mechanism, which is to ground the necessity of the external law that orders particulars in freedom. Freedom is the 'imperishable source of self-kindling movement' and since 'in the ideality of its difference' it has no interest in other differences, it 'relates itself to itself alone, it is *free necessity*' (SL 725).

The definition of resistance in the *Science of Logic* travels far from its beginnings as an absolute resistance to any recognition to a resistance within an accepted or legitimate structure. The resistance of violence is surrendered for a resistance of power that accepts to work and struggle, while respecting a given legal structure. This change in the character of resistance is accomplished by moving from the actuality of the first resistance to the actualization of an alliance between freedom and necessity accomplished through 'legitimate' resistance. Yet, as in 'Force and the Understanding', the preference given to the second mode of resistance seems to be the outcome of a prior decision to contain the actuality of resistance within the possibilities and necessities of self-legislating freedom. Putting this decision itself into question – querying the preference given to freedom and law – would be to put into question the suppression of resistance critical for Hegel's wider speculative project.

Hegel's matrix of resistance

The 1796–1797 fragment ‘The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism’ calls for a rebirth of physics, according to the question of ‘how must a world be constituted for a moral being?’⁷ Yet this physics will not be a mechanics of opposed forces, neither for the natural nor civil worlds. The author takes distance from both a mechanics of nature and a mechanics of the state – since ‘the state is a mechanical thing’ – by proposing that ‘only something that is an object of freedom is called an idea.’⁸ The author will expose ‘the whole wretched human work of state, constitution, government, legal system – naked to the skin.’⁹ Yet, with this programmatic leap from physics to the idea of freedom, the realm of opposed forces is abandoned in favour of a ‘new mythology’ capable of uniting sensibility and reason, enlightened and unenlightened, people and philosophers. The project of ‘giving wings’ to physics becomes one of escaping a ‘mechanics’ of force and reactualizing nature and the moral world in an aesthetic philosophy or mythology. Here, indeed, we see one of the first formulations of the decision to abandon the world of opposed and resistant forces for a world transformed by the idea of freedom, one to be repeated with elaborations throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*.

The decision was more than the reassertion of the Kantian primacy of practical reason in which it seems to be framed. In fact, Hegel had been moving steadily away from the Kantian gesture through his philosophical reflections on the Old and New Testaments that make up his so-called *Early Theological Writings*. In the final expressions of a project that occupied him throughout the 1790s, ‘The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate’ (1798–1800) and the third part or rewrite of the earlier ‘The Positivity of the Christian Religion’ (1800), Hegel explores a complex set of relations between the physics of force, mechanism and the idea. These meditations upon the spirits and fates of Judaism and Christianity are indeed elaborate variations on the theme of resistance and its character, limits and consequences. Among the most salient of these is Hegel’s repeated view that the fate of the monotheistic spirit of Judaism is *mechanism* and the *mechanical* which, in his eyes, condemn it to perpetual, futile if not self-destructive resistance.

This is apparent throughout Hegel’s extended reflections on early Judaism. There can be little dispute about the limited and unsympathetic character of Hegel’s understanding of Ancient Judaism in these fragments, but the prominence of the theme of resistance in both the spirit and the fate of Judaism is one of its striking but little-appreciated features. ‘The Spirit of Christianity

and Its Fate' indeed begins by placing Abraham's creative act of the forging of the 'spirit and fate' of 'his posterity' in a context of fierce military and cultural resistance: 'This spirit appears in a different guise after every one of its battles against different forces or after becoming sullied by adopting an alien nature as a result of succumbing to might or seduction.'¹⁰ The spirit emerges through resistance to external forces and eventually succumbs to its fate, in opposition to internal forces that it is incapable of effectively resisting.

After placing the invention of spirit firmly in the context of resistance, Hegel moves immediately to consider a primal act of resistance mounted against the hostility of nature. According to him, the catastrophe of the Flood provoked 'deep distraction' and 'prodigious disbelief in nature' for its contemporaries, including Noah. Nature became an enemy to be resisted: 'If man was to hold out against the outbursts of a nature now hostile, nature had to be mastered; and since the whole can be divided only into idea and reality so also the supreme unity of mastery lies in something thought or something real.'¹¹ Hegel then explores three strategies of resistance to inimical nature. The first is the creation of the ideal command through law and self-mastery initiated by Noah and, as we shall see, developed further by Abraham. The second is the unabashedly violent resistance to God and nature mounted by the figure of Nimrod:

He endeavoured so far to master nature that it could no longer be dangerous to men. He put himself in a state of defence (*Verteidigungszustand*) against it ... In the event of God's having a mind to overwhelm the world with a flood again, he threatened to neglect no means and no power to make an adequate resistance (*genugsames Widerstand*) to him.

In an anticipation of contemporary geo-engineering projects, Nimrod proposed to build a tower that would defeat the floods: 'He defended himself against water by walls; he was a hunter and a king. In this battle against need, therefore, the elements, animals, and men had to endure the law of the stronger, though a living being.'¹² The spirit of resistance inaugurated by Nimrod confronted violence (*Gewalt*) with violence, leading, in Hegel's eyes, to fateful tyranny and the open contest of inimical forces.

Hegel then contrasts Noah and Nimrod. The first responded to an inimical power (nature) by 'subjecting both it and himself to something more powerful', to a transcendent God, master of both nature and humans. For Hegel, this is the inaugural gesture of the spirit of Judaism, whose fate was to reduce both nature and humanity to objects of divine command against which there could be little resistance. Nimrod on the other hand sought to tame both God and nature

through human powers. Hegel classes both Noah and Nimrod as having made 'a peace with necessity and thus perpetuated the hostility'.¹³ Both are expressions of incomplete resistance whose strategy contrasted with that of Deucalion and Pyrrha in the Greek myth of the Flood, who after the flood 'invited men once again to friendship with the world, to nature, made them forget their need and hostility in joy and pleasure, made a peace of love, and were the progenitors of more beautiful peoples'.¹⁴ In this inaugural moment for Hegel's thought, three possible spirits and fates appear beside each other – two spirits of resistance, one of the covenant and one of sustained resistant enmity – and a spirit of reconciliation, love and friendship.

Hegel immediately follows this discussion with an account of Abraham and the development of the spirit of Judaism out of Noah. In the remainder of these fragments – and programmatically for his work as a whole – Hegel will set the fate of Judaism against the spirit of love and friendship initiated for Greek culture by Deucalion and Pyrrha. Yet, although the specific history of the spirit and fate of resistance inaugurated by Nimrod ends with these few opening lines of 'The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate', it of course persists but is always repressed and hardly ever given open expression. In a sense, the explicit hostility of Nimrod becomes the fate of Judaism, buried in the 'peace of necessity' of the covenants with God, first Noah's and then Abraham's. Hegel's extended exposition of the spirit of Judaism is dedicated to showing how the fate of a disowned resistance repeatedly returned in destructive forms; even after the leadership of Moses and the attainment of the Promised Land, the Jews remained 'subjected to the fate against which their nomadic ancestors had so long struggled, a struggle and a resistance in the course of which they had only increasingly embittered their own and the national genius'.¹⁵ Hegel sees in the spirit and fate of Judaism the outcome of a disowned resistance, one that for him led to increasing separation and an attempt to govern individual and collective life by mechanical conformity to external command.

Instead of returning to Nimrod and exploring the suppressed spirit of resistance, Hegel rigorously sets himself to exploring the contrast between the spirit and fate of Judaism and Greece. In this exploration, the figure of Jesus is crucial as an attempt to transcend the fate of Judaism towards reconciliation, love and friendship. Although he showed how the spirit of Christianity – universal love and freedom – would be diverted by the fate of Judaism, he considered it to remain a work in progress even to his day, and even in the texts he was writing. Yet, there was no explicit place in this debate for the spirit of resistance, even though it remained powerfully present. It returns towards the end of 'The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate' when Hegel reflects on the resistance to fate: 'If a

man fights for what is in danger, he has not lost what he is struggling for; but by facing danger he has subjected himself to fate, for he enters on the battlefield of might against might and ventures to oppose his adversary.¹⁶ Hegel even contemplates the possibility that the clash of aggressive and resistant forces may never be resolved, that there is only ever an actuality of resistance:

For even in the struggle for right there is a contradiction; the right is something thought, a universal, while in the aggressor it is also a thought, though a different one, hence there would be here two universals which would cancel each other out, and yet they persist. Similarly the combatants are opposed as real entities, different living beings; life is in conflict with life, which once again is a self-contradiction.¹⁷

The outcome remains undecided, left either to superior power or to arbitration (the covenant); in both cases, however, the resistance remains even if there has been a renunciation of 'their own mastery of actuality'.¹⁸ Yet, it is hard to see how Hegel's own solution, the turn to freedom and love and later the infinite, does not also involve some renunciation of the 'mastery of actuality'. The idea that fate could be evaded appears too sudden, as in the sentence: 'A man would be entangled in a fate by another's deed if he picked up the gauntlet and insisted on his right against the transgressor; but this fate is turned aside if he surrenders the right and clings to love.'¹⁹ The question remains, however, of whether this 'clinging to love' does not remain a form of resistance, perhaps even a devastatingly effective one. This question seems to be one of the motivations for Hegel's reflections on Jesus and the question of how far he distanced himself from the spirits of Judaism and resistance.

These questions are explored most consummately in the 1800 rewrite of the earlier 'Positivity of the Christian Religion'. Hegel begins by rehearsing his view that the Jewish people were constituted negatively by their resistance to any contact with surrounding peoples, refusing in the spirit of resistance to enter into relations of mutual recognition with them. Yet, such relations were in fact irresistible: 'multiple relations with others were imposed on it by the situation of its small country, by trade connections, and by the national unifications brought about by the Romans.' Hegel describes the predicament of the Jewish People in terms of 'their mania for segregation' and their 'inability to resist' (*nicht Widerstehen können*) political subjection and effective linkage with the foreigner.²⁰ In what we have seen Hegel subsequently describe as a prior resistance or refusal to enter into a structure of recognition, the Jewish People exposed themselves to the annihilatory violence of Rome at the same time as

developing a loveless and spiritless mechanism based on their resistance to their others.²¹ Jewish religious practices are described as 'mechanical', driven and shaped by a resistance to external power that in its turn provoked a wide variety of counter-resistances – the Sadducees, the Essenes, Messianic movements and of course the figure of Jesus.

Jesus is described by Hegel as resisting the mechanical spirit of Judaism in the name of the universality of love. For Hegel, his Gospel was an ambivalent fusion of a violent distantiating from Judaism, resisting it by refusing to resist, and a specific engagement with its structures of recognition or discrete laws. In any case, Hegel emphasizes Jesus' own surprise at the 'resistance [*Widerstand*] offered him by the rooted prejudices of his people'.²² One of the most insidious of these, in Hegel's view, is the conversion of his Gospel by his followers into a doctrine or set of commands – it is as if the spirit of Christianity was delivered to the fate of Judaism: 'Out of what Jesus said, out of what he suffered in his person, they soon fashioned rules and moral commands, and free emulation of the teacher soon passed over into slavish service of their Lord.'²³ Hegel believes that Jesus' specific resistance to aspects of the law themselves were interpreted as commands. For this reason, the Sermon on the Mount was especially important to him as a resistance to law itself rather than particular laws; this resistance that was also indifference could not be commanded:

The whole sermon ends with the attempt to display the picture of man entirely outside the sphere in which it had been sketched earlier, where we had a picture of man in opposition to determinate prescriptions, with the result that the purity of life appeared there rather in its modifications, in particular virtues, as reconciliation, marital fidelity, honesty etc.²⁴

In place of the resistance to individual laws that underwent the fate of becoming laws themselves, Hegel emphasizes Jesus' preaching of the 'extinction of law and duty in love',²⁵ or a resistance to an entire structure of recognition organized according to the Law of the Covenant.

The spirit of resistance thus reveals its own peculiar fate, which is to have the most devastating effect when most unobtrusively present. For far from being the mechanical property of an external relation, resistance is central to the philosophy of spirit. While it explicitly appears throughout Hegel's work as if subordinate to freedom and infinity – in short, as a servant of the absolute – it nevertheless seems as if its actuality is prior to the modal necessity and possibility of the absolute and has to be converted into them. Resistance in the figure of Nimrod with his enmity to nature and God appears beside the spirits of Judaism

and Greece as a shape of spirit in its own right, but one whose fate was to be occluded by the transcendent and immanent absolutes. The spirit of resistance was never given the exposition accorded to the legacies of Noah and Deucalion; it was never recognized as a shape of spirit in its own right. Yet, perhaps it is precisely its unrecognized resistance to given and emergent forms of recognition that keeps spirit as a whole vital and restless, resisting even Hegel's own attempts to absolutize it through recourse to the ideas of infinity and freedom.

Notes

- 1 This part of the *Science of Logic* survives from the 1816 edition; see Di Giovanni's introduction to his translation of *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 2 Even as radically a discursive interpretation of Hegel as Di Giovanni's has to smuggle in resistance in order to progress. His account of the transition to 'measure' in the *Science of Logic* depends on an unthematized appeal to resistance: 'whatever the qualitative determination of such single terms, their stipulated measure persists, internally *resistant* to any external manipulation. Because of this *resistance*, their objectivity (originatively defined as "being") acquires yet another level of formal self-containment, another "for-itselfness"' ('Introduction', *The Science of Logic*, xl).
- 3 Hegel's contemporary Clausewitz represents a development of Kant's thought that remains within the realm of actual opposed forces and thus resistance. His emphasis on the modal category of actuality, which he learnt from his teacher, Kant's student and correspondent Kiesewetter, emphasized war as the clash of opposed forces or, in his terms, of resistance and counter-resistance. He does not seek to ascribe any necessity to law nor to defend a Rousseauian notion of the freedom to self-legislate. His approach remains a position immanent to Hegel, but diverted into philosophy of the infinite and a notion of freedom as self-legislation or autonomy.
- 4 To be precise, in the second section of the second section of the first chapter of the second section of the third division of 'Subjective Logic or Doctrine of the Notion'.
- 5 It is the point where the Venn diagrams used by David Gray Carlson in his commentary on the *Science of Logic* themselves break down. See *A Commentary to Hegel's Science of Logic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 533–4.
- 6 This is noted by Carlson, but without distinguishing between the different modes of resistance Hegel is exploring at this point.
- 7 *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. John Stewart (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 110.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, 111.

- 10 G.W.F. Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 182.
- 11 Ibid., 182–3.
- 12 Ibid., 183.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., 184.
- 15 Ibid., 194.
- 16 Ibid., 233–4.
- 17 Ibid., 234.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid., 238.
- 20 Ibid., 178.
- 21 Ibid., 188.
- 22 Ibid., 179.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., 223.
- 25 Ibid.

Subjectivity, Madness and Habit: Forms of Resistance in Hegel's Anthropology

Kirill Chepurin

Hegel's anthropology is not just a doctrine of the human soul, feeling and the subconscious, and not just the foundational section of Hegel's philosophy of spirit as it took its final shape in the philosopher's Berlin years. It is also, among many other things, a tale of resistance – of how the natural and the bodily resist their 'idealization' by Geist but ultimately become an 'assimilated' part of Geist (both 'idealization' and 'assimilation', as well as occasionally 'resistance', being Hegel's own terms), although not without generating multiple moments of smaller, and more subtle, resistances and counter-resistances along the way. The goal of this chapter is not to address or question this assimilatory narrative of Hegel's anthropological idealism as such, but to elucidate the more important of those moments and to introduce the anthropological logic of resistance as it permeates and runs through Hegel's anthropology.¹

Resistance of and to nature

The tale of resistance begins at the inaugurative moment of Hegel's philosophy of spirit: the moment a human soul is born from nature but not as part of it.² Hegel calls this 'a play of the absolute spirit with itself' (VPG 31) and talks of the soul-as-spirit's 'absolute negativity' (EPS §§ 381–2) vis-à-vis everything that precedes it. Geist, says Hegel in his lectures on the philosophy of history, begins 'from Geist'³ and can only emerge as a 'saltus' (VPG 52), a leap from nature to spirit. This foundational anthropological event and its constantly ongoing repetition (every birth of a human child is for Hegel such a 'saltus')

creates a gap or hiatus between Natur and Geist, between the animal and the human, with which the tale of human spirit as a whole – as told in the third volume of the *Encyclopedia* – commences. Intruding into nature from within like this, into its own ‘other’, Geist creates an inevitable tension between human nature (the soul) and nonhuman nature. This tension is also the first moment of resistance. Initially it is not, however, the soul which resists nature. Although de facto ‘captivated’ (EPS § 387 A; cf. § 385 A) by the generic power of the world that Hegel calls the ‘world soul’ (§ 391), it does not yet feel the need to resist it – on the contrary, the soul’s first waking moment is defined by its *neglect* of the natural flesh of the world from within which it has been born. Even the first cry of the newborn human child, contrasted by Hegel with the ‘dumb’ or ‘mute’ sounds that animals make, is a nonnatural or supra-natural thing, an ‘ideal activity’, cutting through nature like a knife through butter, so that ‘the independence of the external world is null and void (*nichtig*) compared to the human’ (§ 396 A).⁴ The child’s soul itself has unconscious yet ‘absolute certainty’ (VPG 52) of this fact.

It seems that Geist would like to simply ignore nature altogether and assert its instant and immediate dominance over the latter – at which point, however, it is nature itself that starts *resisting* Geist. This process of resistance coincides for Hegel with that of feeling (*Fühlen*): ‘I feel it as that which resists me’ (*mir Widerstand leistend*; VPG 76). The world resists the human touch, refusing to simply crumble beneath it or concede spirit’s arrogantly proclaimed dominance; in part, this happens because, being born from within nature, the human soul is itself *embodied*. As such, it also carries nature within it even as it seeks to disregard it. Nature’s resistance signals to spirit that both nature itself *and* spirit (bodily) exist. However, Geist’s confidence in everything else being *nichtig* before it does not go away, even if, due to nature’s resistance, spirit’s dominance can no longer be merely claimed as immediate. Therefore, since neither nature’s nor Geist’s own body can be simply disregarded by spirit, they must somehow be made ‘spiritual’ or ‘ideal’ (Geist is, after all, defined by Hegel as, among other things, *Idealität* or *Idealisierung*; EPS § 381 A, VPG 30), that is, made part of the world that belongs to human spirit and is not externally resistant to it. If nature does not yield to spirit immediately, it must be ‘idealized’ or mediated; the superiority of the human needs to be asserted not just ‘an sich’, but in actuality, too. Such is, inter alia, the ‘spiritual’ significance of even the most basic interaction between the human and whatever it touches, for example, a child breaking its toys (and generally anything it comes across; VPG 53), which is at the same time connected to the development of self-feeling (or self-awareness,

Selbstgefühl). Thereby begins nature's mediation (idealization, transformation) through spirit: Geist's *counter-resistance* to nature.

At the anthropological level, this counter-resistance or idealization entails at least two important moments. First, there is resistance to all manner of external natural influences through which nature seeks to conform the soul to its own rhythms and patterns⁵ – the influence of planetary life (the movement of the Earth and celestial bodies), climate, seasonal changes and so on (EPS § 392). Since, however, the first act of *Geist* – its birth – is already supranatural, and even the human child is for Hegel captive to nature yet does not belong to it, Hegel insists that this captivity does not have an essential effect on the ('healthy') human psyche. At most, he claims, it leads to some superfluous changes in the mood (§§ 392, 392 R). *Geist* does come under a number of rudimentary natural influences, but in effect it has already left nature behind (§§ 391, 391 A, 392 R), and every further mediation in Geist's path of *Bildung* only makes these influences weaker. Such is, incidentally, Hegel's criticism of astrology and racial theory. While the stars and racial background do exercise a certain influence on the human soul, it is the 'educated' person's task to resist these influences and leave them behind (VPG 36). In particular, EPS § 393 A begins with the criticism of the kind of racial theory that ascribes too much importance to the influence of the race on spiritual activity; racial difference is for Hegel too chthonic a distinction – it is 'bound to the geographical distinction of the territory (*Boden*) that people amass on' (§ 393 A) – and as such, again, must be resisted. All these influences, together with everything else that is merely 'given' to the soul as 'immediate' as if from the outside (and that includes not only the aforementioned natural influence but also things like talents and natural processes like aging), are grouped by Hegel under the header of the 'natural soul' – essentially the lowest stratum of the human psyche. The 'natural soul' is, however, only seemingly 'natural', involving as it does resistance to natural immediacy and the incorporation of natural changes and qualities into a radically new whole where they acquire, as Hegel puts it, a 'spiritual meaning' (VPG 42, 45).

Secondly, this idealization involves not only resisting external influences or mediating that which is given as immediate but also an active *transformation* of nature. This, in its turn, involves 'idealizing' both the soul's environs and its body – both must be incorporated into a world that Geist could call its own, a world of spirit, and both are categorized by Hegel under the rubric of 'sensation' (*Empfindung*) or 'feeling' (*Gefühl*).⁶ Body is for Hegel effectively the apparatus of sensation; even internal organs are for him inseparably and 'spiritually' tied to specific inner or outer senses (EPS § 411 R and A, and the corresponding

passages in VPG). An individual's body can, however, be an unruly thing, and thus needs to be disciplined. This discipline takes for Hegel the form of habit and leads to the body becoming a 'sign' of spirit (EPS §§ 411, 411 R, VPG 132) – which also entails a great deal of mutual resistance between soul and body, and which I will discuss in more detail next. What is important for us here is that both these moments of counter-resistance proceed simultaneously. It is this co-constitution of the individual (including the individual's body) and his or her 'individual world' that Hegel calls 'idealization, or assimilation' (EPS § 381 A). This is not, however, a mere 'metaphorical' assimilation – it is, on the contrary, the agent's body and its material power that allows it to appropriate and construct its surroundings, so that the individual defines its 'individuality' by the 'totality' (*Totalität*) of the things it touches or digests, the things it 'fills' itself with (*Erfüllung* made actual, 'posited' as a process of 'subjectivity'; § 403). The soul-body does not simply consume what it is being offered; it is always in the process of 'positing nature as its [i.e. *Geist's*] own world' (§ 384). Resisting natural immediacy, the soul builds for itself an 'individual world' (*individuelle Welt*) (§§ 402 A, 407 R, VPG 66), by means of the double movement of idealization, in which it appropriates and assembles itself from, just as it imposes itself on the surroundings.

'Without such an individual world', says Hegel, 'the soul would not have any actuality at all' (EPS § 402 A). The counter-resistance to nature leads in Hegel's anthropology to *individuation* – it is an exchange between the soul-body and its environs, in which an 'inner' space of the 'individual world' is constructed and the 'exteriority' of the world is 'sublated' (§ 381 A). On the one hand, the soul can reach out to and 'idealize' (negate or retain) a particular 'immediate' (i.e. given) sensation, relate it to itself and 'make it internal' ('the natural immediate as made ideal within it and appropriated', § 401), place it inside itself (*Er-Innerung*) as yet another building block of the soul's inner world. On the other hand, the soul can reach inside itself for a particular feeling – a memory of or a reaction to a sensation (including such reactions as 'anger, shame, laughter or tears', VPG 84) – which it can produce and enact in its body or surroundings (*Verleiblichung*). Whatever comes from within the soul, Hegel insists, must be *verleiblicht* so that the soul can sense or 'discover' it (VPG 84) – it must become a part of the soul-body and its environs which are thereby influenced and transformed. In the double movement of *Verleiblichung* and *Erinnerung*, the 'natural' is 'idealized' towards the 'posited totality of its [i.e. the soul's] particular world' (§ 403 R) that includes both the 'inner' world of the soul's being-for-itself (*Fürsichsein*) and the 'outer' world of its surroundings, so that the soul, as Hegel indicates, does not

distinguish what rises from within itself and what comes to it from without ('so that', says Hegel, 'we have the unity of the inner and the outer, i.e., sensation', VPG 131; cf. VPG 71, 88).

Anthropological subjectivity

Throughout the anthropology, the soul resists the world by becoming more *independent* of it with each passing logical moment. Resistance to natural immediacy is one such moment. Sensation as the process of *Verleiblichung* and *Erinnerung* described above is another, in which the soul's embodied *Einzelheit* transforms ('idealizes' or 'sublates') its environs into a particular 'individual world', regarded by Hegel as something akin to the individual soul's felt horizon, the entirety of the content that it has, does, or can sense or feel: 'As the actual individuality, we are *in ourselves* a certain *world* of concrete content with an infinite circumference, having, within ourselves, a countless number of connections and relations that always remain inside us.' All these relations, Hegel continues, 'belong to the concrete content of the human soul, so that the latter . . . can be designated as the *individually* determined *world soul*. Since the human soul is a *singular* soul, determined from all sides and therefore *limited*, its relationship to the universe is also determined in accordance with its *individual* point of view' (EPS § 402 A). This 'totality of relationship belonging to the individual human soul constitutes', for Hegel, 'its actual vitality and *subjectivity*' (§ 402 A; emphasis mine). The soul is both substance and subject, the 'what' and the 'who' – the 'concrete content' of the 'individual world', or everything that the individual soul feels, and the *agent* of the double movement of sensation as the incessant cycle of *Verleiblichung* and *Erinnerung*, the 'subject and central point (*Mittelpunkt*) of all [of the soul's] determinations of content' (§ 402 A). The individual soul is, as Hegel puts it, not only a 'world' but also a 'self' (*Selbst*), defined by Hegel as a 'simple relation of ideality to itself' (§ 409).

To elaborate, this entails that, in order to retain itself as Geist and not be swallowed up by the natural element, the soul must define itself not only as an individuality but also as a different kind of *subjectivity* compared to the natural one. As we have seen, in the process of *Fühlen*, the individual soul 'idealizes' or 'assimilates' its 'natural' surroundings into a felt individual world ('I am what I sense, and I sense what I am', § 400 A). At the same time, through this activity of (counter-)resistance, spirit forms its first subjectivity – the 'Subjektivität des Empfindens' that Hegel speaks of in § 403 or, as he further defines it starting

from § 407, the subjectivity of ‘self-feeling’ (*Selbstgefühl*).⁷ The more a soul counter-resists nature (which on its part impedes Geist’s immediate mastery) by mediating and appropriating its environs and bodily operations, the more it gathers itself, focusing itself into a simple point from which it can reach the entire circumference of its individual world and which contains, in a ‘wrapped up’ (*eingehüllte*, VPG 68) or ‘virtual’ (EPS § 403 R) manner, the totality of the world that it has sensed and thereby idealized (see also VPG 74, 88, 131). In this way, Hegel’s anthropology brings together individuation (formation of an individual world) and subjectivation (formation of the anthropological subject of sensation). ‘*Selbstgefühl* is [a] feeling individuality as feeling its *Fürsichsein*’ (VPG 107–8), that is, individuality as the subjectivity of self-feeling that feels its own, independent existence and actuality within the entirety of its individual world.

The soul is therefore, for Hegel, not just the activity of sensation or the totality of the individual content produced by this activity, but also its centre (*Mittelpunkt*), to which the soul ties its every single sensation or feeling. By doing this, the soul resists any possible independence of any sensation, instead tying this sensation to itself as the *Mittelpunkt*. This is how, for Hegel, the distinction between ‘content’ and ‘form’ within the soul emerges. ‘Sensation must define itself. Its *Fürsichsein* is [a] form, and the development of this form is the self-determination of sensation’ (VPG 74). The soul ‘differentiates itself within itself, separates its substantial totality, its individual world from itself, and opposes it to itself as subjectivity’ (EPS § 402 A, see also VPG 88). This ‘form’ of subjectivity is itself an ideal-material part of the totality of the individual world, and every other point within this individual horizon is defined through and within its activity. ‘The second aspect’, remarks Hegel, ‘[is] that this totality makes itself into self-feeling (*sich zum Selbstgefühl macht*), ... makes itself into the self (*sich zum Selbst macht*)’ (VPG 131), that is, into a subjectivity which exists ‘as the subject and central point of all determinations of content’ (EPS § 402 A), ‘the activity of sensation of corporeality as [the] corporeality that exists for itself in distinction from other [things that surround it]; a ‘return [of sensation] to itself’ (VPG 76). The soul, so to speak, displaces itself by going ‘outside’ its own centre to a particular sensation and then brings this and all other sensations ‘back’ to itself (the aforementioned ‘return to itself’). Hence also Hegel’s description of the individual world as a ‘sphere’ (EPS § 391 A; VPG 55; cf. EPS § 401).

The subjectivity of *Selbstgefühl* is thus a *self*-feeling in two interrelated aspects: it feels the entirety of its own individual world, but at the same time it feels *itself* whenever it reaches out to a particular sensation within this world – both

aspects being, of course, two sides of the same process of sensation, since the soul does not yet distinguish the subjective from the objective. It ‘has particular feelings’, but acts ‘as *subject* in relation to these determinations’ (§ 407). The anthropological subjectivity of sensation functions as a repetition or, to use Hegel’s own term, a ‘reproduction’ (*Reproduktion*) – ‘an activity of negating immediacy and reproducing (*Reproduzieren*) the very unity of the inner and the outer. It must tie these connections [between the inner and the outer] themselves to itself, that is, to the self, so that in its activity of sensation and embodying (*Verleiblichen*) it now relates itself to itself’ (VPG 131). This kind of mediation, in which the soul goes out to a particular sensation and then ties it to itself as subject, also increases the subject’s power over the physical world and its own body alike, and as such it is a continuation of the original resistance. Anything that the individual touches or senses has its centre and master in the individual himself and not anywhere else in the world. ‘The individual’, explains Hegel in the lectures, ‘takes his sensation back to himself’, gathers it into himself as the ‘point’ of ‘self-feeling’ which exists ‘in itself’ as well as in every singular sensation (VPG 107–8). I tie every sensation to myself, that is, I assimilate or appropriate it. ‘Engulfed in the particularity of feelings ... , self-feeling is undifferentiated from them’ (EPS § 409); in every particular feeling, the anthropological subject retains and feels itself. What this anthropological subjectivity does is *resist*, at any given moment, the soul getting ‘stuck’ in any particular sensation or feeling. This will prove instrumental for understanding madness and habit in Hegel’s anthropology.

Self-feeling is actually present in any particular sensation – but the reverse is true as well: *Selbstgefühl* is the common virtual origin and centre of anything that the soul senses. In this regard, this anthropological self is something like an inversion of Kant’s unity of apperception. This ‘intensive form of individuality’, as Hegel calls it in § 405 R, is that virtuality of ‘power’ (VPG 92) or ‘strength’ (VPG 68) which is the soul. *Selbstgefühl* is a point as much as a world – a point of individuality that contains its individual world within itself, and an individual world that coincides with and contracts into its intensive focus – a ‘nucleus of feeling’ (*Kern des Gefühlsseins*) that ‘contains ... all further connections and essential relations, fates, and foundations’ of the individual (EPS § 405 R). Furthermore, it is not just an ideal locus – its definition, says Hegel, is ‘embodiment’ no less than ‘spirituality’, *Leiblichkeit* no less than *Geistigkeit* (§ 408), and being ‘submerged’ into the individual’s feeling body, into the ‘particularity of sensations’ (§ 407). ‘As *Selbstgefühl* we are identical with our corporeality’ (VPG 109). This point of *Selbstgefühl*, in other words, *is* my body

(as the locus and apparatus of sensation), and the line that Hegel draws between individuality as ‘content’ and individuality as ‘form’ is a line within the body.⁸ Consequently, resistance as subjectivation is also the idealization of one’s own *body*.

Madness and habit, or, a tale of two subjectivities

It is with this subjectivity of self-feeling that the tale of resistance both resumes and becomes more complex. *Selbstgefühl* acts in Hegel as an ideal-material centre to which every sensation is related at the very moment that is felt. The soul reaches out to a particular sensation but also retains its self-feeling within the latter and then relates it to itself as the anthropological subject. When it *cannot* return to itself, however, when the mechanism of the anthropological subjectivity breaks down and the process of idealization comes to a halt – that is when, according to Hegel, the soul becomes ‘mad’. To be more precise, madness as mental illness is a ‘displacement’ (*Verrücktheit*, the German word for ‘madness’ that Hegel uses) of the *Selbstgefühl* from the soul-centre to a particular sensation or feeling where the soul gets stuck, caught up within this sensation and, as a result, coming to a stop – a sort of paralysis of the activity of idealization. What is it in the constitution of the mind or psyche that, for Hegel, allows for such a displacement? And how, then, does one resist madness?

The reason for the possibility of madness has to do with the fact that, in Hegel, Geist has not one but two centres of subjectivity, and this duality is not exactly unproblematic. Aside from feeling, the human subject is capable of consciousness and reason. In EPS § 405 A, Hegel calls feeling and consciousness ‘two forms of spirit’s existence’ which can, moreover, relate to each other in different ways. In a ‘healthy’ state of mind, the two centres are harmoniously coordinated, so that our sensation does not take us away from the objective world of consciousness (I can process whatever I feel objectively and assign it a place within the totality of the objective world), and all our thoughts and concepts have their empirical foundation in sensation.⁹ In a state of madness, however, the mentally ill individual ‘persists within a *particularity* of his self-feeling, which he cannot process into ideality and overcome’ (§ 408), so that he can no longer find a place for his ‘particularity’ in the objective world of consciousness. The centre of his subjectivity displaced, his soul now cannot ‘point out, within the individual world-system (*Weltsysteme*) that is the subject, the proper place and subordination for the content’ of the particular sensation

in which it has become entangled (§ 408). Elsewhere, Hegel calls madness a state of ‘incongruity’ between soul and consciousness (§ 404 R). The healthy *Selbstgefühl* is, on the contrary, able to command its ‘singular determinations as [its] moments,’ ‘place them ideally within the whole’ and remain ‘for itself within them,’ whereas a *verrückte* soul ‘fixes such a singularity in place without idealizing it, without subordinating it to the simple totality of the whole’ (VPG 123). In madness the individual becomes ‘doubled,’ divided in two: the individual ‘lets himself become captive to a *particular*, merely subjective representation, is thereby *brought outside himself, moved outside the central point* of his *actuality* and acquires (since he does at the same time preserve a consciousness of his actuality) *two central points* – one within the remains of his *understanding* consciousness, and the other within his *mad* representation’ (EPS § 408 A). This ‘schizophrenic’ character of the structure of the human mind is important if we are to understand Hegel’s theory of madness as well as the further moments of resistance in his anthropology.

We first learn that a separation of these two centres is possible from Hegel’s account of hypnosis or ‘somnambulism’ (§ 406). According to this account, which builds on Franz Anton Mesmer’s theory of ‘animal magnetism’ but reworks it to fit the structure of subjectivity that Hegel proposes, whenever I (the patient) am put in an induced state of somnambulant sleep by another person (the doctor or ‘magnetizer’), my subjectivity becomes displaced in such a manner that the other person effectively becomes my consciousness whereas my own, proper consciousness remains turned off, muted. My feeling centre continues to coordinate its sensations with my centre of consciousness, except the latter is now, paradoxically, outside me and inside another individual – I ‘have the other, waking individual as my subjective consciousness’ and am fully ‘in another’s power’ (§ 406 R). As a result, the magnetized patient becomes ‘passive’ (§ 406 R) and the magnetizer can impress his own consciousness – essentially whatever he wishes to impress – upon him. This section of Hegel’s anthropology belongs to some of the most obscure in the entire text; however, here we need not discuss what Hegel, following Mesmer et al., considers the medical and empirical foundation of all these phenomena. What matters for us is precisely the existence of these two centres of subjectivity and the possibility – not just logical, but actual – of manipulating their relationship and somehow pulling them apart, which manifests for Hegel in any state of mental illness, be it animal magnetism (which is, of course, an unhealthy relationship) or madness in the sense defined above. In the latter case, however, the centre of consciousness is not transferred to another person; instead, madness is a split within my own individuality. As

Hegel puts it, 'the subject thus finds itself in *contradiction* between the totality systematized by his consciousness and the particular determination that refuses to be washed away by this totality, does not belong in and is not subordinated to the latter – [such is the state of] *madness* [*Verrücktheit*]' (§ 408; see also the elaboration in § 408 A).¹⁰

Madness is thus the resistance of the feeling individuality to consciousness; in it, a particular sensation resists its further idealization into the objective totality of the world. It is therefore not entirely correct to frame this conflict between the two centres of subjectivity as a conflict between 'the concrete' and 'the abstract' taken in their standard sense, as Slavoj Žižek does, and to claim that, for Hegel, 'a "madman" is precisely the subject who wants to live – to reproduce in actuality itself – the conceptual order'.¹¹ It is true that madness involves sticking with the abstract while neglecting the concrete; hence Hegel's approach to the treatment of madness. However, in this case it is not the 'conceptual order' that the subject 'wants to live', and more important, it is not the conceptual order that is 'abstract', but the particular – and disconnected – sensation or representation that it clings to while disregarding the objective conceptual totality of the world. In this kind of psychological split, furthermore, both subjectivities remain isolated and abstract as the individual remains separated from the concrete reality of both the felt and the conceptual world. This becomes particularly apparent in Hegel's discussion of the third type of madness, 'frenzy' or 'rage' (*Wahnsinn*, § 408 A), where the subject is literally torn between the two abstractions, realizing that they are just that, abstractions, yet unable to reconcile the two and make them cooperate. *Wahnsinn* is for Hegel the most radical form of madness, and of the mutual resistance between the two centres of subjectivity.

The general form of madness is that of resistance, but furthermore, madness is that which every individuality must *resist* in order to preserve itself and stay healthy. Resistance to madness comes in two forms. First, when the mind is *already* ill, it must be treated. In both the *Encyclopedia* and the lectures, Hegel devotes a lot of space to examining the different methods of treating madness that he encountered in the medical literature of the time. All these methods, however, boil down to reestablishing the cooperation between the two centres of subjectivity within the patient's psyche and to 'reminding' the individual stuck in something particular about the objective whole that is the world: 'If someone talks like a madman, the first thing that needs to be done is to remind him about *the entire scope* of his relationships, about his *concrete actuality*' (§ 408 A). Treatment is, in other words, aimed at 'repairing' the mechanism of idealization that has broken down. Second, *Selbstgefühl* can not only resist

consciousness by getting entangled in a particularity and thereby bringing about madness. *Selbstgefühl* can also resist madness itself. This resistance has its own 'mechanism', *habit* (*Gewohnheit*); that's why Hegel calls habit the 'mechanism of *Selbstgefühl*' (§ 410 R).

In Hegel, habit treads the thin line between resistance *of* and *to* individuality. As the mechanism of feeling, habit is that which holds my 'individual world' together by tying every particular sensation of myself as subject back to the 'centre' of my subjectivity, my *self*-feeling. As we saw earlier, whenever I feel something particular, it is as if I go 'outside' myself to this particular sensation. Habit both makes sure that I return 'back' from the particular to myself as subject (so that my activity of feeling doesn't get stuck and I can 'move on') and, furthermore, that I place that sensation within the totality of my objective world ('posit it as ideality', § 410 R, or 'sublate' it, § 410 A). Habit is mediatory not only as an individual but as a supra-individual mechanism, whereby the objective world controls and resists any whims of my individual *Fühlen*. As such, it also *resists madness*. As a mechanism of counter-resistance, it helps idealize the particularity of the individual, tame it, and give it cohesiveness. It is when the mechanism of habit breaks down and the subject cannot 'go back' to itself from a particular sensation that madness kicks in. This kind of dynamics of resistance and counter-resistance does mean that, indeed, madness is a necessary moment in the development of Geist – not, however, as 'a passage through the moment of radical madness',¹² but as constant *resistance* to madness every waking moment of an individual's life. This resistance is 'mechanical' and mostly goes unnoticed, governed as it is by the mechanism of habit, but it is there and plays a decisive role in the transition from the anthropological subjectivity of self-feeling to the phenomenological subjectivity of consciousness.

Habit resists madness by sublating it, but so does madness, too, resist habit by attempting to break it down and tear the two centres of subjectivity apart. Madness and habit thus *resist each other*. Of course, they may also be said to 'repeat' each other, but only by virtue of being two mutually opposed repetitions of the same basic two-centre structure of the mind, one reenacting or reaffirming their difference, and the other their identity. By reaffirming the identity of feeling and consciousness, however, habit also goes over and above individuality as such, becoming at once an individual and a supra-individual mechanism. In habit, 'the soul is in possession of its content and contains it within itself in such a way that within these determinations it behaves not as sensing, does not distinguish itself from them in relation to them nor is engulfed in them, but has them senselessly and unconsciously in itself and moves [freely]

within them'; in habit, the soul is indifferent to its determinations and *ergo* 'free' of them (§ 410) as well as above them, so that it can no longer get too attached to any one of them. Just like the subjectivity of *Selbstgefühl*, habit has the structure of a repetition (hence, again, its mechanistic character). Whereas the repetition characteristic of *Selbstgefühl*, however, consisted in the 're-productive' constitution of individuality and the individual world, habit becomes the next step of this anthropological idealization – an *anti-individual* repetition meant to erase all possibility of self-feeling getting lost within anything particular. The repetition that used to define the soul in its individuality is now, at the next stage of the anthropology, used to resist and suppress the excesses of the same individuality. Hence also the conjunction of 'freedom' and 'captivity' in habit: habit, as Hegel insists, makes us at once 'unfree and free' (§ 410 R). We are, in a certain sense, slaves to habit (even though in § 410 R, Hegel calls this captivity 'formal' and 'relative', and even attempts to mostly limit it to what he calls 'bad habits'). On the other hand, thanks to habit, 'the soul is open for further activity and engagement – open for sensation as well as for consciousness' (§ 410); both this sensation and this consciousness, however, are in their turn regulated and kept in line by habit. Given all that, it is no wonder that habit becomes no less than 'the foundation of consciousness' (§ 409 R), encompassing, further, 'all kinds and stages of the activity of spirit' (§ 410 A).

Such is, for Hegel, the end point of the anthropology – the 'actual soul' (§ 411). Interestingly, at the point of the 'actual soul', the soul finally becomes powerful enough to *resist itself* and thereby transition to consciousness: the phenomenological division between consciousness and the external world proceeds for Hegel from *within* the soul. Metaphorically, Hegel describes this process in terms of the soul 'excluding' its own 'content', that is, the felt world of the anthropology, and 'positing' it 'outside' itself, transforming it into an 'external world' and thereby becoming the 'I' of consciousness (VPG 141). The soul essentially abstracts from itself, which is only made possible by the 'openness' granted to it by habit as the peak and ultimate mechanism of the anthropological path of resistance. This is, so to speak, a *radicalization* of resistance via abstraction. '[The soul] freely releases its immediacy from within itself . . . and this excluded external is in its totality *the world*' (VPG 137; cf. VPG 141). Hegel even calls the transition from the anthropology to the phenomenology an 'act of creation' (VPG 137) – it creates the objective 'external nature' as cognized by spirit and distinct from the felt individual world of the soul. The soul has now excluded itself from itself to become the pure 'I' (EPS § 413). What this transition involves, then, is a change in perspective and the movement to a

different kind of subjectivity – from (self-)feeling to consciousness. It is for consciousness that the world, which the individual anthropological subject of *Selbstgefühl* felt as inseparably its own (since there was as yet no separation of subject from object in feeling), first becomes something *external*, an ‘object’ the ‘I’ sees as standing over and against itself (i.e. a *Gegenstand* – the German word whose literal meaning of ‘something standing over and against’ consciousness Hegel takes up in the phenomenology). This phenomenological ‘creation’ of the world as external – or, in other words, the creation of the very distinction between internal and external – is thus also bound up with resistance.

Conclusion

We saw that *Selbstgefühl* is inextricably tied to the subject’s body, and that the working mechanism of self-feeling – that is, habit – prevents madness and guarantees a healthy mind. Hence, a healthy psyche presupposes being in control of its body, having spiritualized or idealized it and made it into a ‘sign’ of the soul. Habit is that which gives the soul power over its body and helps us be in charge of our body,¹³ and since every sensation is embodied, that means it helps us be in charge of the process of idealization itself. Habit, says Hegel in § 409 R, is ‘corporeality reduced to its pure *ideality*’. That is why the (right kind of) habits that an individual acquires and exercises in the course of his life, including those imposed on him by the family or society as the ethical whole, help assure the proper functioning of the activity of idealization as well as the healthy role the individual is supposed to play in the *Gemeinwesen*. This theme of having ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ habits, and the ‘socializing’ role of habit as a whole, brings us to another important moment of resistance, which I will merely mention here and which joins together the theme of habit versus madness with that of embodied resistance and transformation. It is the individual’s resistance to society, its high point being what Hegel discusses as ‘youth’ or ‘adolescence’ (§ 396 A). Youth rejects the existing society and clings instead to a ‘particular’ abstract ‘ideal’ (VPG 55, EPS § 396 A), disconnected from the objective totality of the ethical whole and therefore empty and fruitless. And if this sounds familiar, it is because Hegel frames this adolescent attitude to the world in the same way (and even the same terms) as he does the madman’s. In fact, it is the closest to the most extreme form of madness, *Wahnsinn*, because the adolescent, too, aims to make his abstract ideal a reality, even if it means a full remaking of the existing world. Just like someone who is *wahnsinnig*, an adolescent person ‘goes against the world’

(VPG 55). In other words, he (consciously or subconsciously) *endorses* the split between the two centres of subjectivity, the world he feels to be ‘ideal’ and the one that actually exists. Similarly to madness, adolescence has the subject stuck in a ‘particular’, counter-productive role, one which is supposed to be sublated through habituation (including, importantly, social habits) and the mastery of one’s body and feelings.

It goes without saying that the adolescent’s resistance to society is for Hegel an ‘untrue’ form of resistance: the ethical whole must not be resisted; on the contrary, the individual must find his own suitable ‘sphere’ within the *Gemeinwesen* and thereby contribute to ‘the work of the world’, *das Werk der Welt*, that is the state (VPG 55, EPS § 391 A; cf. the discussion of the ‘mature man’ and ‘civil society’ in § 396 A). In all the (sub)plots of resistance that we have considered, then, the end result is the same: a certain point of reconciliation, a certain higher indifference – between madness and habit, nature and spirit, body and soul, individual and society – that the subject must reach. Of course, the tale of resistance does not end with the anthropology. In the phenomenology, for example, resistance becomes one *within* and *to* consciousness, be it a struggle between two (self-)consciousnesses (I resist, and there is another ‘I’ which resists me) or the subject-object struggle (where the *Gegenstand* is that which, again, resists its unity with the subject and its idealization by the latter). ‘There is’, however, ‘no resisting the I’, asserts Hegel (VPG 167), and so while the logical structure of the subjective spirit itself is permeated with moments of resistance, the end result is supposed to be free of it – what Hegel designates as ‘free spirit’.

This does not, however, necessarily mean that resistance stops as soon as we reach the free spirit. Nor does it mean that all moments of resistance can be overlooked or their importance underplayed. It is all too easy to point out that Hegel has a higher point of reconciliation in store for each moment of resistance we can name; and indeed, all resistance of an individual is bound to be dissolved by that last point of reconciliation – death. This is, however, just a cop-out, since we have seen that, *as long as the individual lives, he or she resists*. It can, furthermore, be argued that ‘free spirit’ is itself not an end state that we must or can somehow reach, but the underlying logical form or process itself – Geist as encompassing and moving freely through all its determinations at once, which coexist and coexist rather than being teleologically sublated towards some end point. The ineliminability of madness, and its reciprocal resistance with habit, or the ineliminability of the unconscious as such, on which Hegel insists in EPS § 405 and § 405 A, all refer to the fact there is no actual point at which resistance would come to an end. From this perspective, too, we may

consider the persistence of the anthropological in the realm of 'objective spirit', which is the political realm. The adolescent's resistance to society, for example, is a necessary and ineradicable form of resistance, constitutive, as pointed out in § 396 A, of the ethical-political whole through the process of the young person's maturation into a grown-up individual – a generational change which maintains, as Hegel puts it, the 'abiding generation of the world and its further development' (§ 396 A).

Furthermore, since the youth's ethical-political resistance to the social whole rests precisely on the anthropological structure of subjectivity, the structures and mechanisms of resistance at work in the anthropology may allow for other, more properly political kinds of resistance. The latter would, however, require a move that would seem un-Hegelian (in the traditional sense) – a 'freeing up' of these anthropological moments of resistance, suspending them and not allowing them to be synthesized into the 'free spirit' teleologically conceived. Or, alternatively, tracing these points of resistance *inside* the idealized 'free spirit' itself – not as an end state but as a continuous process of resistance and counter-resistance. After all, if Geist is something new compared to the natural status quo, why not to the political status quo as well? If Geist entails a transformation of the natural world into a new spiritual whole, why can or should it not – since every birth of a human soul is a 'saltus' and the emergence of something new – entail a transformation of the preexisting political world as well? This kind of 'Left Hegelian' question, however, goes beyond the scope of this particular chapter.¹⁴

Notes

- 1 Translations of EPS and VPG are my own.
- 2 I consider this moment and its implications in more detail in my 'Nature, Spirit, and Revolution: Situating Hegel's Philosophy of Nature', *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (2016): 302–14.
- 3 Cited in Dirk Stederoth, *Hegels Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes. Ein komparatorischer Kommentar* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 106: 'Spirit does not develop from the animal, does not begin from the animal; spirit must begin from spirit.'
- 4 See also *ibid.*, 106–7.
- 5 In other words, to make it animal, since 'the animal lives essentially in this sympathy [with nature]' (EPS § 392 R).
- 6 As Hegel himself admits in the lectures on the philosophy of spirit, he mostly uses 'sensation' and 'feeling' interchangeably in the anthropology: 'One should not make any significant distinction between sensation and feeling. Sensation expresses the

same thing as feeling, but more from the subjective side, while feeling expresses it more in its determinacy and according to its content' (VPG 69). As such, the soul's world is a 'felt' world, equalling the totality of the content that the soul senses. Cf. EPS § 402 R, where Hegel associates 'feeling' with subjectivity (hence the term *Selbstgefühl* and not *Selbstempfindung*) and 'sensation' with 'passivity' and 'immediacy'. Hegel hereby reproduces the traditional distinction, but it should be noted that he tends not to strictly follow it himself in his analysis of *Empfindung* – sensation for Hegel is in fact neither passive nor immediate; rather, it is an activity and has a certain structure (i.e. it is already a mediation). It is just that, prior to § 407 where he introduces the term *Selbstgefühl* for the soul-subjectivity, he uses the term *Empfindung* for both the singular content of a sensation (sense data) and the focal activity that ties these scattered sensations together within the soul as a peculiar kind of subject. Hence the possible terminological confusion.

- 7 On the history of the concept of *Selbstgefühl* before Hegel, see Manfred Frank, *Selbstgefühl* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002). Unfortunately, Frank's book does not deal with or mention Hegel's anthropology.
- 8 Following François Laruelle, we might call this anthropological subject a 'non-subject' because it has a number of characteristics that make it an *inversion* of the standard subject of cogito. Namely, this anthropological subject is non-Cartesian, non-incorporeal, non-conscious, non-transcendental, non-abstract, non-rigid and non-intersubjective. It is, on the contrary, bodily, feeling, concrete, living and individual. On the non-Cartesian character of Hegel's anthropology, see Murray Greene, *Hegel on the Soul* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972).
- 9 Hegel specifically insists that everything within our mind or psyche has its first foundation in feeling as the first form of knowledge – '*Alles ist in der Empfindung und, wenn man will, alles, was im geistigen Bewußtsein und in der Vernunft hervortritt, hat seine Quelle und Ursprung in derselben*' (EPS § 400 R) – and that the content of reason and of sensation coincide (§§ 447 A, 471 R).
- 10 Incidentally, this two-center structure of madness is also the reason why Hegel insists that reason or consciousness is a necessary *presupposition* for the very possibility of madness (see e.g. § 408 R). The animal, as a consequence, cannot for Hegel become *verrückt*.
- 11 Slavoj Žižek, 'Discipline between Two Freedoms – Madness and Habit in German Idealism', in Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, *Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (London: Continuum, 2009), 111–12.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 98.
- 13 To say this is, of course, not to downplay the other, supra-individual side of habit – as control over us, as mentioned above in my discussion of habit as resistance to individuality.
- 14 Research on this chapter was supported by the Academic Funding Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), grant No. 11-01-0183.

Unthinking Inertia: Resistance and Obsolescence in Hegel's Theory of History

Bart Zantvoort

In a discussion of the historical school of law in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel approvingly cites a passage from Aulus Gellius, which illustrates the vanity of trying to justify existing laws and institutions through reference to their venerable age and historical context. In discussion with the philosopher Favorinus, the jurist Sextus Caecilius retorts as follows:

You know very well that the laws, if they are to be effective and fitting, must constantly change and adapt according to the customs of the time and the type of constitution of the state, as well as the demands and circumstances of the present moment and the ills which have to be rectified, and that, like the face of the heavens and the sea, they do not remain fixed in one state, but are exposed to change through the storm of events and accidents. (PR § 3, my translation)

This passage neatly expresses the sensitivity to history and historical change that is central to Hegel's political philosophy. For Hegel laws and institutions are essentially historical, subject to constant change, and their value has to be considered against the background of a broader pattern of historical development. Shaken by the revolutionary developments in his own time, Hegel became deeply impressed with the relative nature of laws, customs and concepts, the 'restlessness' of historical development, yet – as a young revolutionary, but even in later phases of his life – he was also keenly aware of the hold the old and established order has on the present, its inertia, and the great difficulties encountered in changing it.

Interpretations of Hegel's philosophy of history have traditionally read it as a story of a necessary, teleological development, but the various forms of resistance to change encountered in this process have received much less attention. Hegel

has long been regarded as the quintessential thinker of historical progress, describing history as a sequence of 'shapes' of Spirit, of states or societies which rise, blossom and decay according to a seemingly inescapable law (PH 129; PR § 347 A). The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is presented as the account (*Darstellung*) of the development of these stages, one emerging from the other, in the direction of 'absolute knowledge', and the entire treatise is animated by a fundamental restlessness: 'Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward' (PS 6). Because, according to Hegel, the movement from one stage to the next is driven by the 'logical necessity' (PS 34) of the concept, this movement is itself necessary and 'unhalting' (*unaufhaltsam*) (PS 51). It would seem, then, that nothing can interrupt, resist or delay the progress of history towards its final goal.

But is this really the case? On closer consideration, the movement of historical development in Hegel does not appear to be so straightforward. For one thing, it is clear that the description Hegel gives of historical development in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and elsewhere is not that of a smooth, logical progression; instead, it is a slow process, full of violence, set-backs and unexpected turns of event.¹ History, Hegel writes, is a 'slow movement [*träge Bewegung*] and succession of Spirits, a gallery of images, each of which, endowed with the complete wealth of Spirit, moves so slowly [*träge*] just because the self has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance' (PS 492, translation altered). This sloth, however, need not contradict the overall progressive direction of history. It could simply be ascribed to the need to incorporate and 'digest' the matter of history: yes, in its development Spirit encounters resistance, it is subject to contingency and violence, but this resistance is nothing truly alien. It is Spirit's own presupposition, the arena in which it can test its strength and become what it always already was in essence, as one might put obstacles in a child's path to further its development.

The history of Spirit is the story of the overcoming of resistance. That is why the notion of resistance has always been linked with the attempt to outdo or escape from Hegel. This goes for thinkers like Adorno and Derrida, who struggled to formulate a non-sublatable 'rest' or 'remainder' but also for those like Deleuze and Foucault, who chose for the most part to ignore Hegel rather than engage with him: isn't this strategy simply a recognition of the fact that to engage is already to offer resistance, and therefore to offer more material for the dialectical system to digest?²

Resistance thus appears to be the anti-Hegelian concept *par excellence*. But what if this conclusion is too easy? A closer examination of Hegel's work reveals that the role of resistance is not as straightforward as the above interpretation

would have it. Catherine Malabou, Slavoj Žižek, Frank Ruda and Rebecca Comay have gone a long way in showing the intricate ways in which resistance is woven throughout the Hegelian fabric; in the Freudian subtext of his thought, in particular moments which go against the standard notion of dialectics (habit, madness, the rabble, etc.) and also in the very structure and substance of the Hegelian system.³ In this chapter, I will focus on the structural role of a form of resistance to change or development, which I will label inertia, in Hegel's account of social-historical development. Although Hegel describes development as necessary, he also diagnoses a tendency inherent in all social systems to become inert, ossified and to resist further development. This tendency is not merely an accidental feature of particular forms of social organization, I will argue, but an inescapable moment of resistance inherent to the notion of historical development.

The peculiar tension between development and inertia can be seen very well in a passage from the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here, Hegel describes the necessary and unhalting development of consciousness in unmistakably teleological terms:

The goal is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression; it is the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where concept corresponds to object and object to concept. Hence the progress towards this goal is also unhalting, and short of it no satisfaction is to be found at any of the stations on the way. Whatever is confined within the limits of a natural life cannot by its own efforts go beyond its immediate existence; but it is driven beyond it by something else, and this uprooting entails its death. Consciousness, however, is for itself its *concept*. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself. ... Thus consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands: it spoils its own limited satisfaction. When consciousness feels this violence, its anxiety may well make it retreat from the truth, and strive to hold on to what it is in danger of losing. But it can find no peace [*Ruhe*]. If it wishes to remain in a state of unthinking inertia [*Trägheit*], then thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its own unrest [*Unruhe*] disturbs its inertia.⁴ (PS 51)

While this passage clearly displays the necessity of the development of consciousness, it is also deeply ambiguous. On the one hand, consciousness *has* to go beyond itself, it cannot remain in a state of unthinking inertia, and the progress of knowledge towards its goal is unhalting. On the other hand, however, it is clear that consciousness *does* actually generally remain inert and resists its own development: it feels comfortable and familiar with the particular stage

of knowledge it has reached, it derives satisfaction from it, and going beyond it causes anxiety and is experienced as violence. So inertia is impossible and consciousness can find no rest or satisfaction, but at the same time consciousness is actually inert, thoughtless and satisfied, if only in a limited way. The development of consciousness is not gradual, continuous and unhalting at all; it proceeds through phases or stages, during which it is inert and resists change, and tries to hold on to what it possesses, until it is finally driven beyond itself by its own internal principle of development.

We can see the same dynamic in Hegel's description of social change. In a famous passage from the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel describes the revolution in culture and philosophy which he took his own time to be undergoing:

Besides, it is not difficult to see that ours is a time of birth and transition to a new period. Spirit has broken with its previous world, both in its objective existence and its representations, it now conceives to submerge this world in the past and is engaged in the labour of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never at rest, but always engaged in moving forward. But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth – there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born – so likewise Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms. The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. This gradual crumbling, which left the outward appearance of the whole unchanged, is interrupted by the break of day, which, like a flash, suddenly reveals the structure of the new world. (PS 6, translation altered)

This sense of revolutionary change, of the sudden crumbling of the old order and the beginning of a new world is very pervasive in Hegel's work. As in the development of consciousness, change is not gradual and linear, but consists of long periods of stability interrupted by more or less sudden revolutions or transformations. Development in Hegel takes the shape of a 'punctuated equilibrium': a general predominance of stasis and inertia, during which the present system maintains an overall level of stability, punctuated by periods of sudden and rapid change.⁵ The existing system, whether this is a social system, a shape of consciousness or a system of ideas, becomes entrenched, resists change, persists long past its historical moment. In this sense, for example, Hegel also speaks of the 'entrenched systematization' of dogmatism which had to be

overcome by Kant's critique (the reference to Kant is implicit, but clear). Kant here plays the role of the Terror in the French Revolution: the 'fanatical hostility' towards entrenched dogmatism led to an abstract formalism, which undermined the possibility for all concrete knowledge. Just as with the Terror, however, this moment of excessive negativity was necessary to wipe the slate clean, to break with the old system, and to open up the space for a renewed systematization – that is, Hegel's (SL 26–7).

Positivity and obsolescence

In the realm of social-historical development, the problem of inertia is expressed by Hegel in terms of what he calls 'positivity'. The essence of this problem, which recurs throughout Hegel's writing, is the relation between the dynamic character of life and the inertia and viscosity of the objective social order. Society needs institutions, legal systems and a differentiated, articulated social structure in order to function (PR § 286). Initially, social, political or religious institutions and legal systems are created and formed in accordance with the needs, desires and character of the society from which they spring. But over time, because of their institutional character, they become fixed and rigid and start to live a life of their own. Hegel originally formulated this problem in relation to the institutionalization of the early Christian church in *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*: Christianity developed from a living, self-reflective spiritual community into a 'positive' religion, based on the institutionalized authority of the church and dogmatic faith.⁶ Already in his early writings, however, he saw this degeneration into inertia not as a particular historical accident which befell the Christian church, but as a 'law of historical development'.⁷ The problem of positivity is the problem of law itself: as the objective, publicly recognized reality of social life, laws and institutions make communal life possible, but also constrain its freedom and its development. Laws which were once valid and effective continue to exercise force when the justification for their existence has long been eroded. As Hegel puts this in the essay on *Natural Law*, laws continue to exist 'which have meaning only for the past, and refer to a shape and an individuality which has long been abandoned, like a shell which has died and been stripped away'.⁸

From his earliest preserved writings – his comments on the Bernese domination of the Vaud region, and the essay titled 'The German Constitution' – Hegel was concerned with the inertia and obsolescence of the social and political structures

of his time.⁹ Compared with the developments in revolutionary France, political institutions in Germany appeared to be hopelessly backwards.¹⁰ In a fragment from 1798, 'On the Recent Domestic Affairs of Württemberg', Hegel writes:

General and deep is the feeling that the fabric of the state in its present condition is untenable. . . . How blind are they who may hope that institutions, constitutions, laws which no longer correspond to human manners, needs, and opinions, from which the spirit has flown, can subsist any longer; or that forms in which intellect and feeling now take no interest are powerful enough to bind the people together!¹¹

And, in a letter written in 1807, Hegel links the indolence or inertia (*Trägheit*) of the German states to the revolutionary ardor of the French:

Thanks to the bath of her revolution, the French nation has freed herself of many institutions which the human spirit had outgrown like the shoes of a child. These institutions accordingly once oppressed her, and they now continue to oppress other nations as so many fetters devoid of spirit. What is even more, however, is that the individual as well has shed the fear of death along with the life of habit – which, with the change of scenery, is no longer self-supporting. This is what gives this nation the great power she displays against others. She weighs down upon the impassiveness and dullness of these other nations, which, finally forced to give up their indolence [*Trägheit*] in order to step out into actuality, will perhaps . . . surpass their teachers.¹²

Behind Hegel's criticism of the inertia and obsolescence of his own society we can discern the outlines of a more general theory of social-historical development. Because reason develops itself in history, a particular system of laws and social arrangements can be appropriate to a particular time and people, and yet lose its significance and rationality over time as circumstances change and what used to count as right and rational has now become obsolete. As Hegel writes in *The German Constitution*:

The organization of this body called the German constitution was built up in a life totally different from the life it had later and has now. . . . The course of time and of the civilization that has been meanwhile developing has sundered the fate of that past from the life of the present. The building in which that fate dwelt is no longer supported by the fate of the present generation.¹³

Institutions and laws fail to keep up with social developments and thus come to weigh on them as the inert, stubborn relics of past generations, the lifeless shell which the human spirit outgrows 'like the shoes of a child'.

This theme of obsolescence is also elaborated in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel criticizes both the natural law tradition and the historical school of law represented by Gustav Hugo.¹⁴ Against the school of natural law, Hegel argues that the fittingness of laws depends on their historical context: what is right in one time and type of state may be unsuited for another.¹⁵ In contrast to the historical school, however, Hegel argues that although laws are subject to change this does not mean that what is right or rational is simply what is historically the case.¹⁶ He illustrates this point with the example of monasteries:

If it can be shown that the origin of an institution was entirely expedient and necessary under the specific circumstances of the time, the requirements of the historical viewpoint are fulfilled. But if this is supposed to amount to a general justification of the thing itself, the result is precisely the opposite; for since the original circumstances are no longer present, the institution has thereby lost its meaning and its right [to exist]. Thus if, for example, the *monasteries* are justified by an appeal to their services in cultivating and populating areas of wilderness and in preserving scholarship through instruction, copying of manuscripts, etc., and these services are regarded as the reason [*Grund*] and purpose [*Bestimmung*] of their continued existence, what in fact follows from these past services is that, since the circumstances have now changed completely, the monasteries have, at least in this respect, become superfluous and inappropriate. (PR § 3)

According to Hegel, the standard of rationality according to which particular historical epochs are to be judged itself develops in history. This means, however, that the rationality of existing social-historical structures becomes essentially temporally determined. If both laws and reason are subject to change and development, it is possible for laws to become outdated simply by failing to adapt to changing circumstances or standards of reason. Laws, institutions and social structures in general can become obsolete; they can persist in being when they are no longer appropriate to their context. It is possible for institutions, which were once appropriate from the point of view of the state of development of their era, nonetheless to persist in being when the ground and justification for their existence has disappeared. It is possible for reality to lag behind the development of reason. This development does not have to be taken to be something mysterious: the normative and rational commitments which people hold and can be held to change, both as a result of contingent social and material changes and because of an improved understanding of the objective world. Hegel insists, for example, that slavery is irrational. Because of the development of knowledge, we now know that the arguments which

could be given in its favour – economic necessity, or the existence of essential differences between human races for example – are false. This is the point of the distinction between historical and rational justification. It cannot be strictly said that slavery in ancient times was rational; although there were historical reasons for its existence, these reasons can no longer count as such, and slavery as it existed has, so to speak, retroactively become irrational. It is even possible for people to see the irrationality of obsolete structures in the present clearly, and act accordingly. Hegel gives the example of Roman law: certain of its traditional prescriptions, such as the cutting up of debtors in proportion to the debt owed to various creditors, or the throwing of perjurers from the Tarpeian rock, were so monstrous that lawyers sought to circumvent them by ignoring or deliberately misinterpreting the law. The ability of the lawyers to see the irrationality of these outdated laws and fail to apply them was, according to Hegel, their greatest virtue: ‘The very *inconsistency* of the Roman jurists and praetors should be regarded as one of their greatest virtues, for it enabled them to deviate from unjust and horrible institutions’ (PR § 3). If it is possible for objectified structures to become inert and become irrational through obsolescence, it is also possible to critically assess the present in the light of standards of reason which have progressed beyond what is objectively given.

Inertia as a historical law of change

The problem with ‘positive’ laws and institutions, on Hegel’s account, is that they have a tendency to become fixed and rigid over time and to become divorced from the needs and interests of the community which they are supposed to serve. It is important to realize, however, that this is not a contingent feature of a particular form of social organization, nor is it a question of historical accident; the state described by Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right* continues to be affected by this problem. Just as, according to Freud, there is an ‘inertia inherent in organic life’ – organisms separate themselves off from their environment and mindlessly repeat engrained courses of action – there is also an inertia inherent in social development.¹⁷ Even if, at the time of their formation, laws and institutions are a faithful expression of the needs, desires and intentions of their creators, social life is gradually ossified through its institutionalization and the fixing of social and property relations. As we saw Hegel put it above, there is a necessary tendency for spirit to flee the community, for it to ‘evaporate’, just as consciousness cannot be continually present in all its activities, but has to abandon some to

thoughtlessness and habit.¹⁸ The ossification of society is primarily characterized, on Hegel's view, by the loss of communal spirit, the isolation of individuals from one another, and the dominance of self-interestedness in the community. Society is 'articulated' into 'self-isolating systems' which 'become rooted and fixed' in their isolation. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel suggests that war is a way of countering this tendency to inertia by 'shaking up' the fixed social structure:

The community may, on the one hand, organize itself into systems of personal independence and property, of laws relating to persons and things, and it may likewise organize the various ways of working for what are initially individual purposes – those of acquisition and enjoyment – such that it articulates them into their own assemblies and makes those assemblies independent. The Spirit of universal assembly is the simple and negative essence of these self-isolating systems. In order not to let them become rooted and fixed in this isolation, which would let the whole fall apart and the spirit evaporate, the government must from time to time shake up [these systems] internally by means of war, thereby upsetting their comfortable order [*zurechtgemachte Ordnung*] and right to independence, and throwing them into confusion. The individuals who, by being absorbed [in this system of comfort, order and right] break away from the whole and strive for inviolable being-for self and personal security, are made to feel, through this labour which is imposed on them, their lord and master, death. By dissolving the form of enduring existence, Spirit guards against the tendency of ethical existence to sink back into natural existence, and maintains and raises the self of its consciousness into *freedom* and into its *force*. (PS 272, translation altered)

While this passage refers primarily to classical antiquity, we can also see it as a diagnosis of a more general historical dynamic; there is a tendency in society towards individualism and self-interest, which leads to the increasing rigidity of social relations and institutions.¹⁹ Over time, as society develops and matures, people organize the social structures around them so that they are familiar with them and comfortable within them, they make themselves at home in the world. But this habituation (*Einwohnen*) also spells the end of the dynamism which characterizes a vital society and sets it onto the path towards death (PR § 151 A). Hegel makes this point again in the *Philosophy of Right*. There, too, he sees war as a way of countering the slide of society into inertia and self-interest:

In peace, the bounds of civil life are extended, all its spheres become firmly established, and in the long run, people become stuck in their ways. Their particular characteristics [*Partikularitäten*] become increasingly rigid and

ossified. But the unity of the body is essential to the health, and if its parts grow internally hard, the result is death. Perpetual peace is often demanded as an ideal to which mankind should approximate. Thus, Kant proposed a league of sovereigns to settle disputes between states, and the Holy Alliance was meant to be an institution more or less of this kind. But the state is an individual, and negation is an essential component of individuality. Thus, even if a number of states join together as a family, this league, in its individuality, must generate opposition and create an enemy. Not only do peoples emerge from wars with added strength, but nations [*Nationen*] troubled by civil dissension gain internal peace as a result of wars with their external enemies. (PR § 324 A)

War, however, is not the only way out. Another option is colonization; in the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel describes how societies become ‘ossified’ and dominated by vested commercial interests. In the Middle Ages, this was a result of the role of the guilds in controlling economic and social life, which led people to found new cities in order to escape the rigid social order of the old ones: ‘This was the origin of Altona next to Hamburg, Offenbach next to Frankfurt, Fürth next to Nürnberg and Carouge next to Geneva.’ But the same problem recurs in modern times, on a larger scale; the colonization of North America, according to Hegel, fulfils the same function as the founding of new cities in earlier times, acting as an escape valve for the ossified societies of old Europe.²⁰ And finally, yet another possibility is that the inert social order is overthrown in a revolution. If institutions fail to adapt to changing norms and social circumstances, popular discontent will grow so intense as to provoke ‘disturbances of the peace’:

The spirit of the constitution develops, and the constitution is transformed. ... If the spirit [of the constitution] becomes of itself progressively more mature and institutions do not alter with it, there is genuine discontent, and if nothing is done to dispel this, we get disturbances of the peace owing to the fact that the self-conscious concept contains other institutions than actually exist; there is a revolution.²¹

War, migration and revolution are therefore three possible ways of dealing with the inertia inherent in social development. These three options, moreover, stand in a complicated set of relations to one another. War and revolution in particular are intimately related. Hegel already noted the connection between inner turmoil in the state and external war in his discussion of Greek ethical life in the *Phenomenology*. There, it is precisely the weakness engendered by the conflict between individuality and the universality of the state, a conflict internal to the Greek form of life, which causes other states to ‘rise up in hostility’ against the

state and destroy it from the outside (PS 287). And the French Revolution, it could be argued, is the logic of war as a means of interrupting inertia driven to its logical conclusion. As society develops, it also becomes more institutionalized; in the modern state, the 'articulation' of social functions, the division of labour and the role of individualism is driven to levels previously unknown. Inertia is no longer restricted to the private or economic sphere; in ancien régime Europe the state system itself had become paralysed and captured by entrenched private interests (as evidenced, for example, by the extremely high levels of venal office-holders in pre-revolutionary France). This means, however, that 'shaking up' the ossified social order could no longer be achieved by a good, but limited dose of healthy warfare, as recommended in the quotation above from the *Phenomenology*. From this point of view, the French Revolution and Napoleonic total war are the outcome of this historical logic. Inertia and social development are intrinsically connected: as society becomes more complex, more capable of organizing and maintaining itself, at each successive stage of development, it also becomes correspondingly more resistant to further development. The fully institutionalized state can resist change more effectively when its basic structure has become obsolete, so that a revolution which affects all aspects of society is necessary to break this inertia. It is possible, therefore, that the progress towards freedom and rational organization in society is accompanied by the intensification of social control and violent conflict – an Adornian thesis which, however, is not entirely strange to Hegel.²²

Against mobilism

This brings us to the most important question: to what extent does this moment of inertia in social-historical development really contradict the traditional view of Hegelian dialectics as an unstoppable progressive development which overcomes all resistance and integrates all differences? Isn't the obsolete persistence of an antiquated structure, which Hegel clearly describes as a possibility, merely a contingent moment which is, in the end, always overcome and sublated into a new form of life which, as Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology*, has to start its development from the beginning, but at a higher level (PS 492)?

In order to answer this question, it is important to realize how much the notion of inertia complicates the standard image of historical development in Hegel. It is true that the overall picture, as it was presented here, is that of the 'punctuated equilibrium' pattern described at the beginning: a society develops by creating institutions and laws; over time, this objective social order becomes

inert or entrenched, while historical development (whether this is conceived as a result of changes in ideas and norms, economic and technological development, or simply changes in the environment) continues; so that the social order as a whole becomes obsolete; eventually, the pressure to change becomes too great, ‘disturbances of the peace’ occur and a revolution takes place. But this does not mean that the process of historical development as a whole follows a predetermined course, with the moment of inertia just introducing a slight delay which allows for the organic growth and proper digestion of the social organism. If it is possible, as Hegel indicates, for a social structure to persist in obsolescence, to survive past its due date, this undermines the whole notion of necessity in historical development. The revolution does not come when the development of the old structure has run its course, since the whole point of the notion of obsolescence is that it is possible for institutions and laws to endure even when they are no longer rational or necessary.

With regard to this strange temporal structure of revolutions in Hegel, Rebecca Comay notes that ‘there is no right time or “ripe time” for revolution.’²³ When the revolution comes it always comes too late, because the structure it overturns was already obsolete. At the same time, it comes too early, because the conditions for a revolution are never right. As Slavoj Žižek puts this with reference to Rosa Luxemburg, a revolution always has to fail at first, since the preconditions for a successful revolution only come about through this failure.²⁴ For Žižek, this means that the prevalent view of Hegel as a thinker of ‘mobilism’ or historicist evolutionism is completely wrong. Historicist evolutionism ‘conceives historical progress as the succession of forms, each of which grows, reaches its peak, and then becomes outdated and disintegrates, while for Hegel, disintegration is the very sign of “maturity”, for there is no moment of pure synchronicity when form and content overlap without delay.’²⁵ While the former is precisely the view that Hegel at first glance would seem to hold, Žižek insists that this is to miss the core issue. According to ‘the predominant historicist “dynamic” reading of Hegel’, ‘reality is a dynamic process of continuous change in the course of which everything solid sooner or later melts away, all static shapes (or “essences”) are just frozen moments of this process, which disintegrate after their brief time is over, all negativity and lack are just perspectival illusions generated by the all-encompassing affirmative process of generating differences’. But for Žižek,

the properly Hegelian reply to this vision of the dialectical process begins by rejecting its underlying evolutionary premise: if there is anything absolutely alien to Hegel, it is the idea that, in the course of historical change, a certain

form of life gradually emerges, first in the guise of confused indications, then it reaches maturity, has its moment of glory, and finally follows the way of all living things and passes away. The very core of what we may call the basic Hegelian intuition is that *there is never a 'proper' moment*: a form of life is thwarted from its very beginning, it deploys its potentials as a desperate strategy to cope with its immanent deadlock . . . For a proper dialectician, there is no moment of maturity when a system functions in a non-antagonistic way.²⁶

Of course, saying that what Žižek here calls 'mobilism' is absolutely alien to Hegel is going too far, since Hegel often presents historical development in terms similar to the ones Žižek here rejects. The point is, rather, that the anti-mobilist moments of inertia and obsolescence show that the mobilist reading of Hegel is not necessarily wrong but one-sided: inertia is a spoke in the wheel of the dialectical machine, the, as Žižek calls it in a different context, 'non-dialectizable core' at the base of dialectics.²⁷ Žižek himself says as much when he distinguishes between 'upward-*Aufhebung*' and 'downward-*Aufhebung*'. While upward-*Aufhebung* would represent the standard understanding of sublation, where the contradictory nature of immediate reality is reconciled 'in an ideal/notional form', downward-*Aufhebung* 'involves a different negation of the negation (alive-dead-undead) whose outcome is a spectral apparition that haunts the living as something that resists sublation in its inertia, something that, precisely insofar as it is nothing in itself, having no substance, cannot be negated and/or sublated'.²⁸ Žižek's preoccupation with ghosts and zombies stems precisely from the possibility of the inert persistence of something which already, by rights, should have passed away.²⁹

In conclusion, then, I would like to point out three ways in which the notions of inertia and obsolescence as I have developed them challenge the traditional notion of Hegel as a thinker of historical progress.

First, the moments of the development of a form of life on the one hand, and its becoming obsolete and inert on the other cannot be separated logically or temporally. The development or 'maturation' of a society consists of the creation of laws and institutions, and the meaning and effectiveness of these laws and institutions is by definition temporally bound. In a certain sense they are obsolete from the moment they are instituted. This is why, as Žižek points out, there is never a smoothly functioning harmonic social system, which subsequently begins to decay and becomes obsolete: inertia is not an avoidable, secondary characteristic of historical development, but a necessary feature of objectified, institutionalized social life.

Second, the direction of historical development in Hegel is not unequivocally progressive. Progress is also regress; the greater rationality, complexity and

reflexivity of more advanced forms of social organization also lead them to be more inert, resistant to adaptation and further development, and subject to greater social and economic tensions, inequalities and disruptions. Historical development may have led to greater individual freedom, prosperity and more powerful and effective states, but it may also lead to increased social and political inertia, alienation, social tensions and violent revolutions.

Third, the contradictions and oppositions which characterize earlier forms of social organization are not necessarily definitively overcome in later forms. Sublation, as is often noted, means both negation and preservation; but preservation here means that sublated conflicts can continue to live an 'undead', inert existence and resurface in a kind of return of the repressed. For example, the opposition between individuality and universality in the Greek *polis* (as Hegel presents it in his reading of *Antigone*) is not resolved in the transition from the Greek to the Roman form of life, or in any of the later forms. It is merely displaced, and continues to haunt the vision of harmonious social life of which Hegel doubtless sometimes dreamt.³⁰

Notes

- 1 For example, in the lectures on the *Philosophy of History* (PH 127) Hegel writes:

In the history of the world, there have been several great periods of development which have come to an end without any apparent continuation; whereupon, in fact, the whole enormous gains of past culture have been destroyed, with the unfortunate result that everything had to start again from the beginning, in the hope of regaining – perhaps with some help from fragments salvaged from the lost treasures of the past and with an incalculable new expenditure of time and energy, crimes and sufferings – one of the provinces of past culture which had originally been conquered long ago.

- 2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 2004); Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).
- 3 Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (London: Routledge, 2005); Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012); Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (New York: Continuum, 2013); Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

- 4 Translation altered: here and in all subsequent quotations, I replace Miller's 'Notion' for 'Begriff' with 'concept'.
- 5 I borrow the notion of punctuated equilibrium from Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 922, 970–1.
- 6 See 'The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate' and 'The Positivity of Christian Religion,' in G.W.F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox and R. Kroner (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).
- 7 Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 28.
- 8 G.W.F. Hegel, *Jenaer Schrifte 1801–1807* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 527, my translation.
- 9 Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 74.
- 10 See Comay, *Mourning Sickness*.
- 11 G.W.F. Hegel, *Political Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 244 (translation slightly altered). The passage continues with a call to political action: 'It is not only dishonourable but contrary to all sense, when things are felt to be tottering, to do nothing but wait confidently and blindly for the collapse of the old building, which is everywhere decaying and has its foundations undermined, and to submit to being crushed by the falling beams.'
- 12 *Briefe von und an Hegel*, vol. 1, 4 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1969), 138. Translation in PR 397.
- 13 Hegel, *Political Writings*, 146. Similarly, in the 'Proceedings of the State Assembly in Württemberg' Hegel writes that 'an actual positive right a hundred years old rightly perishes if the basis constituting its existence disappears' (ibid., 282–3).
- 14 See Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 205–14.
- 15 Similarly, Hegel argues that good government is a question of timing, of waiting for the proper moment:

The executive must ... wait until the thought that has been expressed has matured. ... Sovereigns who have not waited long enough have done harm despite all their power and good intentions. ... This is why Joseph II's actions appeared despotic, because he did not wait for the proper moment to arrive – to do so is the mark of a very great spirit. For if it is planted in a still unready soil, the good on the contrary bears evil fruit.

Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science (Heidelberg Lectures 1817–1818), trans. J.M. Stewart and P.C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 271.

- 16 See also *Political Writings*, 282–3. For a helpful distinction between the points of view of historical explanation (which merely shows that certain laws were in

- fact considered valid and authoritative), historical justification (which justifies particular laws as appropriate to a certain historical moment and form of life) and philosophical justification (which shows laws to be rational upon philosophical reflection), see Mark Alznauer, 'Ethics and History in Hegel's Practical Philosophy', *Review of Metaphysics* 65, no. 3 (2012): 603–8.
- 17 Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 612–13.
 - 18 See Hegel's wonderful discussion of habit in *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, ed. J.M. Petry, vol. 2 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979); see also Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*; Slavoj Žižek, 'Discipline between Two Freedoms – Madness and Habit in German Idealism', in *Mythology, Madness and Laughter* (London: Continuum, 2009).
 - 19 Francis Fukuyama calls this tendency 'political decay'; he is here clearly influenced by Hegel. See Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).
 - 20 G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 109 (my translation).
 - 21 *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, 270.
 - 22 See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 28. See also Marcuse's psychoanalytical reading of this issue, which echoes Hegel's discussion of labour and desire in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1987), 23, 56: 'The very progress of civilization leads to the release of increasingly destructive forces.'
 - 23 Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 7.
 - 24 Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 190–1.
 - 25 Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 439. See also Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 193, 199.
 - 26 Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 376–7.
 - 27 Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 492.
 - 28 Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 332.
 - 29 Ibid.: 'Hegel does offer a way to de-ghostify a situation in which we are haunted by ghosts, to exorcise the ghosts, as it were not by somehow finally succeeding in sublating their inertia but, paradoxically, by bringing inertia to an extreme in the infinite judgment of identifying spirit with the most non-spectral, inert, and vulgar materiality of a bone...' Inertia or 'stuckness', Žižek argues in *Less than Nothing* (483), is the precondition for revolutionary change:
 ...the inertia of the Old and the rise of the New also coincide in the dialectical notion of repetition. The New emerges when, instead of a process just 'naturally' evolving in its flow of generation and corruption, this flow

becomes stuck, an element (a gesture) is fixed, persists, repeats itself and thus perturbs the 'natural' flux of (de)composition. This persistence of the Old, its 'stuckness' is the only possible site of the rise of the New: in short, the minimal definition of the New is as an Old which gets stuck and thereby refuses to pass away.

- 30 For a careful analysis of this tragic dimension of Hegel's thought, see Karin de Boer, *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Part Three

Politics

Freedom and Dissent in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*

Karin de Boer

From the Arab Spring onward, the twenty-first century has witnessed a number of efforts to oppose or overthrow regimes considered authoritarian, supporting corruption and thwarting democracy. Regardless of what happened after these events, we have retained the images of thousands of demonstrators, young and old, men and women, secular and religious in the streets of Cairo, Istanbul, Kiev and many other cities. Seen from a contemporary perspective, nothing is more self-evident than the link between freedom and dissent.

If we go back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, the ideas of freedom and dissent were not as closely linked as they are today. In his famous essay 'What Is Enlightenment?', Kant argues that political progress should come about through public debate rather than through speech or action that might disrupt the status quo. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel likewise puts order above unchecked individual freedom, and this in the name of rationality. He does so to such an extent that the *Philosophy of Right* seems to leave no room whatsoever for dissent on the part of citizens. This might be taken to confirm the view that Hegel's political philosophy adheres to the ideals of the Prussian restoration that took root after the Napoleonic era. Yet, this view has been rightly criticized by a number of commentators. In 1839, the conservative Karl Ernst Schubarth, defending an anti-individualist, organicist conception of the monarchy, considered Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* to entail a 'call to insurrection and rebellion' – a claim which today few would be prepared to make.¹ Coming from the opposite direction, many contemporary commentators have argued that Hegel's account of the state has much in common with the economic, social and political reforms that Stein, Hardenberg and others had proposed and partly carried out between 1807 and 1819.²

Yet this 'reformist' reading of the *Philosophy of Right* does not sufficiently answer the question as to why Hegel in this work asserts the principle of individual freedom, but is either silent about the right of individuals to dissent from the government or straightforwardly opposes the possibility of dissent.³ This chapter aims to find out whether Hegel was indeed against all forms of political dissent and, more important, whether his views on the matter contain elements that may still be relevant to an assessment of the contemporary world.

In order to answer these questions, I first examine passages in the *Philosophy of Right* that implicitly or explicitly deal with forms of dissent (sections 2–5). Apart from a section on parts of the Preface, my discussion is limited to Hegel's account of civil society and the state, which means that I will disregard his remarks in the parts devoted to abstract right and morality. In my opinion, it is unclear to what extent the more liberal stance Hegel takes up here can be harmonized with the parts of the *Philosophy of Right* explicitly devoted to the political sphere.⁴ Similarly, there might well be a tension between this work and what Hegel actually thought about the matter of dissent during his Berlin years but did not dare to put in print. Since this tension is outside the scope of this chapter, I will largely abstract from his remarks on the subject in his various lecture courses.⁵ After considering Hegel's account of freedom of speech (section 6), I will try to determine the extent to which Hegel's almost complete silence on the subject of dissent follows from his conception of philosophy (section 7). On this basis, I will argue that Hegel's insight into the destabilizing effects of the modern idea of freedom, though at odds with our notion of democracy, has not become completely irrelevant (section 8).

The Preface

The first occurrence of the issue of dissent is in the Preface. It is well known that Hegel postponed the publication of the *Philosophy of Right* after he learnt about the Karlsbad decrees of September 1819, which imposed severe censorship on the states of the German Confederation, prohibited the liberal and nationalist student movement, and forced universities to fire professors deemed to undermine the government.⁶ In the year that followed, Hegel added a Preface and made adjustments to the rest of the manuscript so as to ensure his book would not attract the attention of the censors.

This is not to say, however, that Hegel did not mean what he said in the Preface. Most relevant for present purposes is his denouncement of the student fraternities that in the years after the fall of Napoleon had been voicing their discontent with the authoritarian politics of the German Confederation. In October 1817, 468 members of these fraternities had come to the Wartburg castle from all over Germany to commemorate both the beginning of the Reformation in 1517 and the battle of Leipzig in October 1813, during which Napoleon was defeated. The students used these events to express their frustration about the fact that their liberal and nationalistic ideals were thwarted by the conservative duchies and states of which Germany consisted.⁷

The philosopher Jacob Friedrich Fries was one of the few professors who attended the festival. Apart from giving a brief speech, he allowed a longer text to circulate among the students and to be read aloud during one of the meetings. In this text, Fries treats the virtues of the German people, freedom of thought and speech, the elevated responsibility of the young and the sacred rights of friendship.⁸ His plea for a form of democracy probably comes out most clearly in the following passage:

If, however, the spirit of a people had developed into a truly communal spirit, justice, chastity, and self-sacrificing patriotism would reign in this people. Moreover, in this people all business related to public affairs would gain its life from below, from the people.⁹

Two years after the festival, in 1819, one of Fries' students murdered the conservative writer August von Kotzebue.¹⁰ In order to repress the social unrest, the German Confederation issued the Karlsbad decrees. As a result, Fries was dismissed from his position at the University of Jena the same year because of his role in the student movement.¹¹ In the Preface of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel attacks Fries by claiming that he presented the truth about state, government and constitution as that which everyone 'lets well up from his heart, emotion and enthusiasm' (15, translation modified). Explicitly referring to Fries' text, he denounces the latter's view that political matters should be decided by the people and that feeling suffices to judge about political matters (cf. PR § 279 R). Instead of dissolving everything into 'a pulp of "heart, friendship, and enthusiasm"', philosophy should comprehend the state as the rational articulation of the ethical, such that the strength of the whole emerges from the harmony of its parts.¹² Obviously, Hegel held that this insight into the idea of the state could be achieved through his speculative science alone.

The Preface opposes Fries not just by drawing on the opposition between reason and feeling, but also by arguing that philosophy should not be concerned with positing an ideal that has nothing to do with the state such as it has come to be:

Since philosophy is the *fathoming of the rational*, it is for that very reason the *comprehension of the present and the actual*: it does not erect an *otherworldly realm* that should exist God knows where – or rather, of which we can very well say that we know where it exists, namely, in the error of a one-sided and empty ratiocination. (20, translation modified)

Seen from Hegel's perspective, Fries' ideal of democracy is unrelated to the conditions that have to be in place in order for a modern state to be rational, that is, to be to the largest possible extent exempt from arbitrariness. A rational state requires a clear division of powers as well as institutions and laws that protect the freedom of citizens but, above all, serve the purpose of the state's self-preservation. Whereas the tone of Hegel's attack is harsher than it could have been, I take it that he did not have to deviate much from his actual views in order to oppose Fries and liberalism more generally. He most likely shared their criticism of the status quo but not the ideals that motivated it. The only thing we can infer from the text is that Hegel rejected the views of his liberal contemporaries because he thought they did not derive from insight into the very idea of the modern state. On the basis of the Preface, it is impossible to know what he thought about the Prussian government at the time.

Civil society

I now turn to what I take to be the most important parts of the *Philosophy of Right*, namely, the chapters on civil society and the state. In the *Philosophy of Right* as a whole, Hegel aims to dissect the determinations that a modern state must possess in order to be rational. This rationality takes the form of a system of right, which Hegel calls the 'realm of actualized freedom' (§ 4). On the one hand, the various elements of this system must accord with the very idea that the human being as such is free. On the other hand, they must guarantee that the potential proliferation of this freedom does not destroy the society as a whole. The question as to how to contain the effects of the modern determination of freedom is highly relevant to the sphere of civil society, which Hegel takes to be defined by the tension between the principles of particularity

and universality (§ 182). This means, more concretely, that citizens, insofar as they act within this sphere, are free to pursue their particular interests as long as they do not infringe on those of others. For Hegel, it follows from the very idea of a *modern* state that citizens possess the freedom to pursue their own interests. It follows from the very idea of a *rational* state, on the other hand, that this freedom be kept in check by forms of universality, that is, by structures through which citizens unknowingly or knowingly abandon their immediate egoism on behalf of a larger whole.

In the chapter devoted to civil society, Hegel begins by discussing what might be called its most abstract determination, namely, the tendency of individuals to pursue their particular aims no matter what. If we isolate this element from the whole, civil society 'affords a spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruption common to both' (§ 185). In 1807, Prussia had abolished serfdom and other aspects of a feudal socioeconomic system, which meant that many people were deprived of their traditional livelihood. Moreover, after losing the war against Napoleon, Prussia's economy was devastated. As a result, large groups of poor people were roaming the country in search of food or work. In the passage just quoted, Hegel seems to refer to the increasing gap between a small elite and a large mass of poor people ensuing from the modern market economy. Both the rich and the poor, he suggests, tend to focus exclusively on their particular interests, that is, ignore the interests of the community that Hegel calls universal.

Later in the text Hegel addresses this tendency from a different angle, now focusing on the question as to how a modern society should deal with the unsettling phenomenon of the rabble:

When a large mass of people sinks below a certain standard of living – which automatically regulates itself at the level necessary for a member of the society in question – that feeling of right, integrity, and honour which comes from supporting oneself by one's own activity and work is lost. This leads to the creation of a rabble, which in turn makes it much easier for disproportionate wealth to be concentrated in a few hands. (§ 244)

The rabble is defined not so much by poverty as by its 'inward indignation (*Empörung*) against the rich, against the society, the government, etc.'¹³ In Hegel's time, the rabble did not explicitly protest against its deplorable conditions. Yet, its lack of respect for the existing laws and institutions might be considered a way of calling upon the government to solve the problems created by the transition to a modern market economy. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel does

not judge this situation. But it is clear that, in this text, he does not consider the anarchic lifestyle of the rabble to represent a warranted form of protest against the government.¹⁴ However, it does not follow from this that he rejected all ways in which citizens might articulate their discontent and suggest modifications to the existing laws and institutions. Does Hegel's account of the state perhaps leave open channels for dissent?

The state

As regards Hegel's analysis of the essential determinations of a modern state, there seems to be no hope for the rabble, because people without regular jobs do not belong to one of the three estates – or social classes – that in Hegel's view should provide the basis for the participation of citizens in national politics (§§ 201–5, 304–9). The same holds for students. However, even citizens who do belong to an estate cannot participate in national politics through parliamentary elections. Hegel rejects democracy because he considers it to be based on an atomistic conception of the citizen at odds with the organic structure of the state:

The idea that all individuals ought to participate in deliberations and decisions on the universal concerns of the state ... seeks to implant in the organism of the state a *democratic element devoid of rational form*, although it is only by virtue of its rational form that the state is an organism. (§ 308 R)

Moreover, Hegel held that democratic elections often fail to achieve their purported aim, namely, instituting a government that represents the people as a whole rather than the interests of a particular elite:

[A]n institution of this kind achieves the opposite of its intended purpose, and the election comes under the control of a few people, of a faction, and hence of that particular and contingent interest which precisely ought to have been neutralized. (§ 311 R, translation modified)

For Hegel, the French Revolution preeminently illustrates the problematic nature of any form of direct political participation of individual citizens. If citizenship is considered to result from a social contract, as Rousseau suggested, then the people have the right to break the contract if they are unsatisfied with the performance of the government. Yet, if the main task of a state consists in preserving and enhancing the rationality of its laws and institutions, as Hegel maintains, then framing dissent in terms of a contract

between citizens and the sovereign misses the point. Hegel dismisses the view of the state as a means that serves the interests of its citizens, for as he sees it these interests are not necessarily rational, and may favour particular groups at the cost of others and, hence, the society as a whole. In Rousseau's conception of politics, he writes,

the union of individuals in the state is reduced to a contract and therefore to something based on their arbitrary wills, their opinion, and their capriciously given express consent; and abstract reasoning proceeds to draw the logical inferences which destroy the absolutely divine principle of the state, together with its majesty and absolute authority. (§ 258 R)

Thus, individual citizens, however large in number, should not be granted the right to elect the government, because elections are likely to result in the domination of particular interests rather than universal interests.

A similar argument can be found in the context of Hegel's account of the relationship between state and church. Whereas religion may well be necessary to edify the people, a rational state cannot allow religious leaders to interfere in political matters. The state, Hegel writes,

retains the right and form of self-conscious, objective rationality, the right to enforce the latter and to defend it against assertions based on the *subjective* variety of truth, no matter what *assurances* and *authority* this truth may carry with it. (§ 270 R)

Hegel's argument against both democracy and the participation of religious leaders in politics hinges on the view that the political sphere should not be determined by the particular interests of particular individuals or groups. His point seems to be that a society is rational only insofar as it succeeds in neutralizing the sphere of particular interests, which in his view should be given free rein in civil society alone. This means, on the one hand, that citizens and religious leaders should be denied a determining role in matters that concern the state as a whole, because there is no way to prevent them from pursuing their particular interests rather than serving the interests of the society as a whole. It also means, on the other hand, that the king and the nobility should not be allowed to act in view of their particular interests, as is the case in a feudal system. For Hegel, the monarch represents the 'idea of something unmoved by arbitrary will' (§ 281). Only if the choice of the head of state is not mediated by elements such as elections can the unity of the state be 'saved from being dragged down into the sphere of particularity with its arbitrariness, ends, and

attitudes, from the strife of factions round the throne, and from the weakening and destruction of the power of the state'.¹⁵

The *Philosophy of Right* outlines a system aimed at reducing the impact of particular interests to the largest possible extent. This requires a proper balance between the legislative, executive and princely power (§ 273). Within this system, citizens can be involved in the legislative and executive powers in three ways.¹⁶ First, they can devote themselves to the interests of the society as a whole in their capacity as civil servants (§ 303). Insofar as they do so, they make up what Hegel calls the universal estate (§ 250). Obviously, civil servants are supposed to abstract completely from their particular interests. Insofar as they act as civil servants, it does not make sense to ask whether they can give voice to dissent or not – they cannot. Second, citizens can participate in the legislative power in their capacity as members of the nobility or what Hegel calls the substantial estate (§§ 305–7). This basically means that they can take a seat in the Upper House of the Estates Assembly by dint of their birth. Hegel grants them this right because he holds that men who are responsible for the land they inherited can mediate between the monarch and the estate of citizens who do not depend on land to make a living, that is, the second estate (§ 307). Third, citizens who belong to the second estate can participate in the legislative power in their capacity as representatives of corporations, whether in the form of trade associations or cities, that is, of civil organizations that represent the interests of particular groups. The representatives, or deputies, of these corporations make up the Lower House of the Estates Assembly as Hegel envisaged it (§ 308, cf. § 251). So it is basically through these deputies that common citizens can voice their concerns about the actual state of affairs or suggest that certain laws or practices be abolished or put in place.¹⁷

However, the role Hegel grants these deputies is rather limited. Although they represent their corporation, claims put forward by a corporation can only be relevant insofar as they conform to universal interests. Deputies are required, Hegel notes, 'not to support the particular interest of a community or corporation against the universal interest, but essentially to support the latter' (§ 309, translation modified). Thus, if a corporation would call for a change in the educational system because their profession requires certain skills, such a demand would only be taken into account insofar as it can be shown to harmonize with the interests of the society as a whole. By contrast, if the association of university professors – provided it could exist – would demand that women get the right to obtain degrees and go on to become professors, this would likely have been considered to undermine social stability. Moreover,

members of neither of the two Houses can actually propose legislation. The Estates Assembly is supposed to be 'a lively gathering where, through mutual instruction, the participants convince one another of the advice to be given' (§ 309). The representatives of corporations seem to be relevant primarily because they can inform the ministers of matters relevant to their profession (§ 311) and, conversely, because they can inform the other members of what the government has decided (§ 315). Only the ministers have the right to actually propose laws to the monarch (§ 283).

Freedom of speech

As Hegel sees it, someone only counts as a member of the state insofar as he is a member of one of the estates (§ 308 R). Those who are members of the first or second estate can participate directly or indirectly in political deliberations, but, as said, only by subordinating their particular interests to those of the society as a whole. But which venue would have been left open for someone like Fries in Hegel's political system? Would he have been allowed to communicate his views through pamphlets and public speeches? Given the formal freedom of each individual, citizens must have the right to express their views on matters that regard the society as a whole, including political matters. As Hegel puts it, public opinion contains 'the true needs and legitimate tendencies of actuality' (§ 317). He may well have thought in this regard that the students had rightly stood up against the authoritarianism of the Prussian government. Yet, for Hegel, the public opinion that results from the views expressed by individual citizens is an ambivalent affair (PR § 316, cf. VRP III 820–1). In his view, the genuine insights into the true needs of society are likely to be distorted by particular opinions based on feelings rather than reason:

As soon as this inner content attains consciousness and is represented in general propositions ... all the contingencies of opinion, with its ignorance and perverseness, its false information and its errors of judgment, comes on the scene. (§ 317)

For this reason, he adds, public opinion 'deserves to be *respected* as well as *despised* – despised for its concrete consciousness and expression, and respected for its essential basis, which, more or less distorted, only appears in that concreteness' (§ 318, translation modified). Given this assessment, it is not surprising that Hegel was not in favour of unlimited freedom of speech. On

his account, this freedom can only be granted if there are laws that prevent or punish its 'excesses' (§ 319). These laws ought to curb

injuries to the honour of individuals as such, slander, abuse, vilification of the government, of its official bodies and civil servants, and in particular of the sovereign in person, contempt for the laws, incitement to rebellion, etc. (§ 319 R)

Hegel adds, however, that excesses would be rare if the state were not blameworthy, that is, if it had a constitution, if the government were stable and if the meetings of the Assembly were public. A state that allows citizens to voice their opinions in the context of these meetings leaves 'little of importance for the others to say' (§ 319), which implies that the censors would not have to interfere very often. But would the censors, if Hegel's system had been implemented, have punished Fries because of the text he allowed to be read at the Wartburg festival? They probably would. Yet even so, one might point to the fact that Prussia did not have a constitution at the time. By his own lights, Hegel should therefore have admitted that Fries had reasons to take issue with the actual state of affairs.

In sum, Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right* holds that citizens should not be denied the freedom to express their opinions. Yet he puts most weight on what he saw as its destructive side, namely, its potential to stir up the masses at the cost of social and political stability. On Hegel's account, freedom of speech must be curbed because of the potential proliferation of political views driven by particular, arbitrary aims rather than by insight into the requirements of a truly rational state. Whereas he affirms that a *modern* state requires freedom of speech, he holds that the requirements of a truly *rational* state must prevail. If, in other words, a modern society is to be rational, it has to pay a price, namely, a limitation on what citizens are allowed to say in public.

The task and limits of philosophy

So far, I have discussed a number of passages where Hegel argues against forms of dissent. These passages can be said to concern the content of the *Philosophy of Right*. Yet Hegel's stance towards dissent in this work might also ensue from his view about the proper task of philosophy. Thus, in his lectures on the philosophy of right from 1822/1823, Hegel maintains that actual states may well be imperfect,

but that these imperfections are irrelevant in view of the fact that they, one way or another, embody the very idea of the state:

Any state can be found to have defects, for things can be one way or another, but considered in itself this is either something external or a singularity . . . that by no means affects the nature or concept of the state. (VRP III 721, cf. PR § 258 A)

Citizens, be it individuals or a majority, may well complain about, for instance, the behaviour of a particular king. Hegel does not deny that such complaints can be warranted. Yet he takes them to be irrelevant to philosophy, which is exclusively concerned with institutions such as the monarchy as such. Evidently, citizens might also oppose the very institution of the monarchy. In that case, I take it, Hegel would argue that the philosopher should disregard their claims and demonstrate that a truly rational state requires a constitutional monarchy. If the will of the many is not in line with the rationality grasped by the philosopher, Hegel would dismiss it as irrelevant:

Contrary to the principle of the individual will, we need to recall the basic concept according to which the objective will is in itself, in its concept, rational, whether or not it is known by individuals and willed by their personal choices. (PR § 258 R)

If, on the other hand, citizens would demand that their state become a constitutional monarchy, Hegel would argue that their demand follows from a genuine insight into the 'true needs and legitimate tendencies of actuality' (cf. § 317). In sum, the criterion that allows the philosopher to determine what is rational and what is not does not depend on what the masses happen to want.

As was seen above, Hegel, along the same lines, insists in the Preface of the *Philosophy of Right* that the task of philosophy is not to construe a state such as it ought to be, but rather to comprehend that which is rational (21). This can be taken to mean that he, in the wake of Kant, took the *Philosophy of Right* to investigate the conditions of possibility of a modern rational state. As said, in order for the state to be truly modern, it must embrace the principle of individual freedom. In order for it to be truly rational, conversely, it must possess practices and institutions that prevent this principle from taking the upper hand. Seen from Hegel's perspective, these practices and institutions follow from the very idea of a modern rational state and make up the totality of its determinations. Revealing these determinations requires that one disregard the outer appearance

of actual states, in other words, the bark that covers the rational core. What philosophy must do, in his view,

is to recognize in the semblance of the temporal and transient the substance which is immanent. ... For since the rational, which is synonymous with the idea, becomes actual by entering into external existence, it emerges as an infinite wealth of forms, appearances, and shapes, and surrounds its core with a multi-coloured bark ... which only the concept can penetrate in order to find the inner pulse. (21)

Hegel must have thought that most of the reforms proposed by Stein and Hardenberg were drawn from insight into the true needs of the time. He only had to present the content of their proposals as ensuing from the very idea of a modern rational state. The question as to whether these contents had been adequately realized in a state such as Prussia, England or France is a question that in his view does not regard speculative philosophy.

But what if there were something so rotten in a state that even on Hegel's account dissent would be justified? In his first Berlin lectures (1818/1819), Hegel suggests that discontent is warranted if the self-understanding of a society has outgrown the existing institutions, and that efforts intended to suppress the privileges of the nobility may well be justified.¹⁸ The *Philosophy of Right* is silent about this possibility.¹⁹ Especially after 1819, Hegel may well have thought it prudent to avoid the topic in his published work. Yet he may also have had more philosophical reasons to disregard the possibility of justified massive dissent in his published work. I would like to propose three such reasons.

First, as said, the *Philosophy of Right* deals exclusively with the structures and institutions that define a rational state. If these structures were embodied adequately in an actual state, citizens would have no reason to oppose the government and would of their own accord identify with the interests of the society as a whole.²⁰ Second, within the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel abstracts from the historical development of actual states. This means that he cannot discuss how the rational core of any modern state might break through its irrational bark. As the example of France shows, this might well require massive dissent or even a revolution. While Hegel by no means excludes this possibility, it simply falls outside the scope of the *Philosophy of Right*. Third, Hegel took the modern world as such to be defined by its insight into the freedom of the individual and the political requirements that follow from it. He considered the modern world not just to be a phase in the history of mankind to be surpassed by the next but to represent the ultimate actualization of the rational as such. Accordingly, he held

that modern states might be defective with regard to the actual implementation of the structures and institutions that follow from the idea of the state, but not with regard to this idea itself:

The development of the state into constitutional monarchy is the achievement of the modern world, in which the substantial idea has attained infinite form. The *history* of this ... development ... is the concern of universal world history. (§ 273 R)

Evidently, a written constitution is rational in that it prevents the potential interests of the monarch and his ministers from encroaching upon the interests of the society as a whole. Interestingly, Hegel here refers to an institution that around 1820 had been realized in a number of states, but not in Prussia.²¹ After the defeat of Napoleon, King Frederick William III of Prussia had promised his people a constitution, but this promise had not been kept. Yet the widely shared insight into the necessity of a constitution seemed to have mattered more to Hegel than the question concerning its actual implementation. He may well have assumed that once a specific insight has been achieved, it would sooner or later be turned into adequate political institutions. Whether or not that process involves non-institutionalized forms of pressure from the people is a question that, as said, he takes care to avoid.

Conclusion

Hegel's lofty terminology often conceals what I take to be the core of his argument against the possibility of dissent. I take this core to consist in the view that modern societies face a tremendous challenge, namely, to let citizens exert their freedom in such a way that their particular interests do not unhinge the society as a whole. Seen from Hegel's perspective, the state must not only ensure that the monarch and the nobility do not put their own interests above those of the state, but must also prevent the opinions of citizens from playing a decisive role in political matters. Whereas these opinions may have a rational core, they tend to be driven by ideological motives – for instance religion – or economic interests, and therefore cannot be trusted. Hegel thought that a modern society could preserve itself only by restricting the realm within which citizens could exert their freedom to civil society. On his account, this is simply the price a society has to pay in order to be not just modern, but also rational. Even though Hegel admits that public opinion may be right in some cases, he generally

presents the will of the people in terms of particular interests, disavowing the difference between, on the one hand, justified concerns about outdated or repressive laws and practices and, on the other hand, efforts of citizens to advance their economic interests by political means. Hegel would not have been able to differentiate between, for example, today's advocates of human rights or the environment and, on the other hand, ruthless lobbyists of multinationals. This I take to be a major shortcoming of the *Philosophy of Right*.²²

However, I hold that we can nevertheless take away something from Hegel's negative stance towards democracy.²³ To be sure, democracy has proven to be a very powerful means to channel dissent and fight authoritarianism, clientelism and corruption. Yet democracy testifies to the same ambiguity that Hegel attributed to freedom of speech. On the one hand, it is a way of reducing the risk that a head of state or a small elite put their particular interests above those of the society as a whole. On the other hand, democracy creates opportunities for a large number of citizens and companies to influence politicians and steer political decisions. In many countries, politics has become entangled with the interests of banks and multinationals to such an extent that the state threatens to be reduced to an instrument by means of which a small elite satisfies its proper aims. While thus suffering from the same defects as preceding political systems, democracy tends to conceive of itself as the ultimate solution to these defects. It is this prevailing self-conception that the *Philosophy of Right* can be said to put into question. Whatever we may hold against Hegel, we can learn from him that it is extremely difficult for a state to be both modern and rational, that is, to pay heed to the principle of individual freedom and at the same time to make sure that particular interests do not encroach upon the interests of the society as a whole. Even if we do not accept the remedy that Hegel proposes, his diagnosis of modernity is perhaps more relevant than ever before – he saw it coming.

Notes

- 1 Karl Ernst Schubarth, 'Über die Unvereinbarkeit der Hegelschen Staatslehre mit dem obersten Entwicklungsprinzip des Preußischen Staats' [1839], in *Materialien zur Hegels Rechtsphilosophie*, Band I, ed. Manfred Riedel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 256.
- 2 See, among others, Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12–14; Ken Westphal, 'The Basic Context and Structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick

- Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 234–69; Thomas Malcolm Knox, 'Hegel and Prussianism', in *The Hegel Myths and Legends*, ed. Jon Stewart (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 70–81; Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 423–86; Daniel Lee, 'The Legacy of Medieval Constitutionalism in the *Philosophy of Right*: Hegel and the Prussian Reform Movement', *History of Political Thought* 29 (2008): 601–34.
- 3 See Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 105. Wood notes that Hegel, to his knowledge, is 'completely silent on the question of what we should do when we are confronted with an unjust law which the authorities expect us to obey'.
 - 4 Without questioning the congruity between the various parts of the *Philosophy of Right*, Thomas Petersen, in 'Widerstandsrecht und Recht auf Revolution bei Hegel', *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 82 (1996): 472–84, considers Hegel to hold that citizens who follow the dictates of conscience are warranted to take part in forms of political resistance (482). See also Klaus Vieweg, *Das Denken der Freiheit. Hegels Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (München: Fink, 2012), esp. 448–61. Aligning Hegel with Locke and Hume, Vieweg assumes that Hegel's remarks in the *Philosophy of Right* on the right to resist enslavement, the formal right of the individual to life (*Notrecht*) and on acts of resistance based on moral grounds constitute the basis of what he considers to be Hegel's defence of political resistance against cases such as tyranny. On his account, there is no doubt that the 'logical' principle he attributes to Hegel, according to which the reversal of injustice is justified in all cases, also applies to the political level. Vieweg accounts for Hegel's reticence on the subject of political resistance by referring to the problem of censorship at the time (454). While this may well have played a role, it seems to me that the textual basis for his interpretation is rather thin.
 - 5 See Vieweg, *Das Denken der Freiheit*, and Mark Tunick, 'Hegel on Justified Disobedience', *Political Theory* 26, no. 4 (1998): 514–35 for discussions that treat the *Philosophy of Right* on a par with the lectures. I agree with Tunick's main claim that Hegel's criterion for determining whether a form of disobedience is justified is rationality rather than a given set of rules and practices.
 - 6 See Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, 437–42.
 - 7 The students believed in a unified Germany ruled by a monarch who would act on behalf of the people. They also demanded that the people participate in national politics to a larger extent. Commemorating 300 years of Reformation, the students gathered at the Wartburg castle expressed their frustration that, four years after the defeat of Napoleon, nothing of their high expectations for the future had come true. On this, see Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, 395–99; Matthew Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism: The Transformation of Prussian Political Culture, 1806–1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108–13; Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom, the Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (Harvard, MA: Belknap Press 2006), 378–9.

Avineri points out that the fraternities, while progressive in some sense, were not enlightened in all respects:

To present their aim as merely agitation for German unification is simple-minded: they were the most chauvinistic element in German society. They excluded foreigners from their ranks, refused to accept Jewish students as members and participated in the anti-Semitic outbursts in Frankfurt in 1819; at the Wartburg festival they burned a huge pile of books by authors to whose work they objected ... The anti-rationalism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, intolerance and terrorism of the *Burschenschaften* present the same syndrome which, under different circumstances, the Nazis were to institutionalize.

Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 119. In my opinion, terms such as 'terrorism' are exaggerated. Avineri does not mention, moreover, that the burned books were emblematic of the reactionary forces at the time.

- 8 See Jakob Friedrich Fries, 'An die deutschen Burschen' [1817], in *Sämtlichen Schriften*, Band 26, ed. Gerd König and Lutz Geldsetzer (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 2004), 72 and the editors' Introduction, *ibid.*, 20–4.
- 9 Fries, 'An die deutschen Burschen', 77. Compare PR 15. Hegel's quote of the text is not literal and combines various phrases.
- 10 Kotzebue's *Geschichte des deutschen Reichs* (1814) was among the books burned during the Wartburg Festival, as was Haller's emblematic *Restauration der Staatswissenschaft* (published in four volumes between 1816 and 1825). In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel vehemently denounces Haller's reactionary work, writing that it not only deliberately 'dispenses with the rational content of the state and with the form of thought, but fulminates with passionate zeal against them both' (PR § 258 R; see also the long note appended to this Remark).
- 11 See Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, 442; König and Geldsetzer, 'Vorbemerkung der Herausgeber', in: *ibid.*, Jakob Friedrich Fries, *Sämtlichen Schriften*, Band 26, xi–cxvii.
- 12 PR 16, translation modified. In the Preface, Hegel seems to overemphasize the elements of Fries' position, and that of the student movement, with which he disagreed, passing over his agreement with their criticism of the conservative status quo: like them, Hegel was against the traditional privileges of the nobility and in favour of a constitution that would limit the power of monarch. In the main text, on the other hand, Hegel might be said to attempt to harmonize the fraternities' struggle for individual freedom with what he took to be the requirements of a truly rational state (cf. PR § 316).
- 13 PR § 244 A, cf. VRP IV 608–9. See Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (London/New York: Continuum, 2011) for an insightful account of Hegel's discussion of the rabble.

- 14 In students' notes on Hegel's course on the Philosophy of Right from 1819/1820, Hegel is reported to have noted that the right to life or right of necessity (*Notrecht*) applies not merely to, for example, a poor individual who steals food in order to survive, but also to the situation of the rabble as a whole. In this case, the neediness (*Not*) 'no longer has this purely momentary character'. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts. Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, ed. Dieter Henrich (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1983), 196. While Hegel refers, in vague terms, to the 'power of the particular' in the sentence that follows, he does not *explicitly* state that the neediness on the part of the rabble implies the right to collectively breach the law or revolt against the rich. However, this may be taken to be implied by his connection between the right of distress that concerns individual cases and the collective distress he attributes to the rabble. Contrary to Henrich, I hold that these remarks do not suffice to infer that Hegel attributes to the rabble the right to revolt against the government or even initiate a revolution. See Henrich's introduction ('Vernunft in Verwirklichung'), 20. In this regard, I agree with Tunick's assessment (Tunick, 'Hegel on Justified Disobedience', 529). See also Domenico Losurdo, *Hegel and the Freedom of Moderns* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 153–79. Losurdo relates Hegel's remarks on *Notrecht* to revolts at the time against factory owners. I follow his rendering of *Notrecht*.
- 15 PR § 281. Hegel does not seem to take into account the threat of tyranny, which is of course the main reason to distribute political power to part of the members of a community. He apparently thought the system of checks and balances he envisioned would suffice to prevent the monarch from putting his own interests above that of the nation.
- 16 On this, see Westphal, 'The Basic Context and Structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*'.
- 17 The participation of the two estates does not serve the purpose, Hegel notes, of increasing the quality of the deliberations and decisions; rather, this participation is rational because it accounts for the moment of 'formal freedom', that is, individual freedom, by allowing everyone to be at least informed about the process of political decision making (PR § 314).
- 18 In Germany, Hegel notes, the various institutions have not been developed in a harmonious manner, such that 'recently introduced institutions often do not fit in with those of longer standing'. The same holds true of England, 'where all disorders and discontents derive from the struggle that the rational constitution has to wage against the many privileges that impede it and conflict with it'. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft*, 1817–18, *Vorlesungen*, Band 1, ed. Claudia Becker (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1983), 270; translated and edited by J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson as *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 320–1. This passage is taken from Wannenmann's notes, which do not correspond to Homeyer's (see VRP III 238).

- 19 An Addition to the *Philosophy of Right* suggests that Hegel was opposed to any form of revolt if it occurs within a well-organized constitutional monarchy. He distinguishes this possibility from rebellion against a foreign oppressor, of which he suggests that it can be justified: 'If a rebellion occurs in a province conquered in war, this is not the same thing as a revolt in a well-organized state. The conquered people are not rebelling against their sovereign prince, and they are not committing a political crime, for they are not linked with their master ... through the inner necessity of the constitution' (§ 281 A, my emphasis). According to Hardimon, Hegel is opposed to revolutionary action in the *Philosophy of Right* because citizens should reconcile themselves with existing institutions (to the extent that they correspond to Hegel's description of them). Reconciliation, Hardimon writes,

is incompatible with certain forms of radical or revolutionary action. To be reconciled is, among other things, to believe that no fundamental social transformations are necessary; because to say that the social world is a home is to say that the basic arrangements of the family, civil society, and state (i.e., the arrangements described in the *Philosophy of Right*) are acceptable. To be reconciled is also to believe that the essences or underlying rational structures, of the family, civil society, and state are realized to a significant degree.

- M.O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy. The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 122–3. Apart from begging the question, this account is not in agreement with the specific sense in which Hegel uses the term 'reconciliation': it refers to the insight into the rational core of political institutions that can be achieved by philosophers and has nothing to do with endorsing actually existing institutions (whether rational or not). See PR 22.
- 20 This is what Hegel takes to be the true meaning of patriotism. This disposition, he writes, 'is in general one of *trust* . . . or the consciousness that my substantial and particular interest is preserved and contained in the interest and end of another (in this case, the state), and this insofar as the latter relates to me as an individual' (PR § 268, translation modified).
- 21 By 1820 it was clear, however, that absolute monarchism was giving way to constitutional monarchism. Sweden and Norway had adopted constitutions in 1809 and 1814. After the Congress of Vienna (1814–15), which had put forward constitutional monarchy as the most adequate political system, the Netherlands and France developed new written constitutions. The Congress of Vienna also required the duchies and kingdoms of the new German Confederation to adopt written constitutions. However, as Congleton points out, Prussia and Denmark 'continued with their unwritten (informal) constitutions in place'. Roger

Congleton, *Perfecting Parliament: Constitutional Reform, Liberalism, and the Rise of Western Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 253.

- 22 However, while we today are able to make such distinctions at a theoretical level, our actual political systems clearly fail to do so: allowing citizens to vote often means allowing corporations to advance their own interests by indirectly exercising political power. While this is certainly not always a bad thing – in cases where the opinion of consumers is more ‘rational’ than the stance taken by the political establishment – it exemplifies the essential instability of modern democratic systems. This development might be taken to illustrate the erosion of the very distinction between citizens and consumers.
- 23 On this, see Karin de Boer, ‘Democracy Out of Joint? The Financial Crisis in Light of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*’, *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 66 (2012): 36–53.

Elements of an Inversive Right of Resistance in Hegel

Klaus Vieweg

From a very young age, Hegel had been interested in the topic of tyrannicide, in the right of resistance against despotism. In the late Tübingen fragment *Unsere Tradition* ('Our Tradition') we find a reference to Harmodius and Aristogiteon, who are considered to be republicans because they assassinated the tyrant. In Hegel's view, both attained eternal glory because 'they slaughtered the tyrant and gave equal rights and laws to their citizens.'¹ It is probably hard to imagine Hegel as a rebel or as a protagonist of the idea of rebellion – he is mostly considered to be exactly the opposite, and to this day the dominant cliché view of Hegel sees him as an advocate of restoration or as an apologist for Prussian state paternalism. Since this kind of nonsense is still widespread, I will present here a few of the main features of Hegel's theory on the inersive right of resistance.

Hegel presents some basic elements or building blocks of such a theory in his *Elements of a Philosophy of Right*. According to Hegel, the confrontation with a 'great degree of misfortune' and severe poverty combined with the *higher right to preserve one's existence* give rise to the right of resistance: this right is granted to each subject that rebels against the need it suffers. Hegel's reflections on the right of necessity (*Notrecht*) present an essential foundation for considerations on the gulf between wealth and poverty as a basic problem of civil society. The following passage could be formulated today with as much urgency as it was then: 'It would require but limited resources to alleviate the misfortune of many people, yet these resources are the free property of others' (VRP III 398). Thus, the principle of the right of necessity is also of considerable relevance for our time, in which every day countless free beings starve or die of preventable diseases due to a lack of medicine and environmental degradation; from Hegel's point of view, these are blatant violations of *rights*.

The following reflections comprise three parts: first, some observations on the foundations of Hegel's legitimization of the right of resistance; second, a presentation of the theory of 'second coercion'; and last, a sketch of the successive stages of the right of necessity or emergency that I take to be implicit in the *Philosophy of Right*. In this regard, I will argue that for each of the three stages of the concept of right and freedom distinguished by Hegel – abstract right, morality and ethical life – there is a corresponding determination of the right of resistance, which secures the subject's rights against possible violations.

Considerations on the right of necessity

A passage from a student's notes on a course given by Hegel may serve as an introduction, because it *explicitly* addresses the right of rebellion and resistance in relation to the right of necessity. According to Hegel, the right of rebellion (*Empörung*) stems from the widening gap between great wealth and abject poverty,² 'the right to revolt against the order that denies every realization of the will of free people.'³ This abysmal misery, in which bitterness, anger and outrage arise from a situation of unimaginable distress, has been dramatically portrayed by 'deep thinking and feeling' minds such as Rousseau (VRP IV 477). Hegel here formulates the *right of necessity to revolt*, that is to say: the right of the poor and discriminated to start a revolution in order to restore justice.

In Hegel's eyes, the right to *recovery or restitution of the foundations* of the legal state does not in any way stem from an arbitrary insurrection or an illegal usurpation of power, but it concerns the legitimate claim of the citizen to a guarantee of his or her rights. Rousseau is to be accorded a high level of esteem because he was deeply moved by the misery of the people and because he depicted the inner bitterness and justified indignation of the poor in an especially appropriate manner. However, the conclusion that he drew from it, namely the rejection of civil society altogether, led to another extreme, one that denied and despised the principle of subjective particularity as a core element of modernity. The 'only alternative was to completely abandon such a system [of modernity]', to sacrifice it entirely (VRP IV 477). But the *elimination of the principle of particularity* came at a high and totally unacceptable price: it fundamentally undermined freedom. Hegel refers to the kind of fanaticism and fundamentalism that marked the time of terror of the French Revolution as an expression of the 'intolerance towards everything particular'. Any distinction, any particularity with respect to talents and institutions was contrary to the

abstract and therefore one-sided understanding of equality (PR § 5). It should be stressed that Hegel here only takes issue with the abstract understanding of equality and not at all with the concept of equality as such. What is at stake here, however, is a *reconstitution* of civil society based on right, rather than the creation of a different society. The clear, profound and even insurmountable conceptual divide with Marxist ideas should therefore be impossible to overlook. Nevertheless, futile attempts are still being made to bring about a rapprochement between Hegel and Marx.

For Hegel, there is a *right of resistance against violations of the principle of modern freedom*. In legitimate forms of resistance, the civil-societal and political dimensions are interconnected. The preceding forms of indignation (*Empörung*) are present in the ultimate, decisive form of politics, that of the resistance of citizens as political protagonists. Resistance against massive poverty, environmental degradation, educational discrimination or the aspirations of indigenous people to social and political recognition are considered to be examples of *juridically* permissible actions, namely, in the name of self-defence, as resistance against injustice.

Where there is no law, insofar as it does not guarantee the existence of individuals and the well-being of society, the individual is left all on its own without any rights. To the extent that the discriminated or excluded person reverts to being in the situation of having no rights, as a slave, as it were, he has – like a slave – ‘the right to break his bonds at all times; [. . .] his right is imprescriptible’ (VRP IV 239) – his right of resistance arises from this condition. In addition to this formal-legal side, the ‘slave principle’, the right of resistance also springs from the sphere of morality: on the one hand, proceeding from the ‘Socrates principle’ of a demand for legitimation through one’s own testing of the legitimacy of the existing order and inner resistance; on the other hand, on the basis of the right of necessity with respect to well-being. The progressively determined right of resistance rests on these pillars. ‘Within the conditions of society hardship at once assumes the form of a wrong inflicted on this or that class’ (PR § 244 A), from which springs the right of *moral self-defence* that concerns the sphere of civil society and anticipates the actual political context.⁴ Insofar as civil society has particularity and thus self-interest as its principle, it suffers from conflicts that are a sign of its imperfection, and it is in need of rational control and regulation, of a rational design by the social state that guarantees justice. As Rousseau writes: ‘One of the most important things for a government to do, therefore, is to prevent extreme inequality in wealth, not by depriving the rich of their possessions, but by denying everyone the means

of accumulating them; and not by building poorhouses but by ensuring that the citizens do not become poor.⁵ This still applies today to impoverishment in terms of subsistence, education or healthcare. On the whole, poverty and social injustice today give rise to a considerable reduction in opportunities and a limitation of the right to full and equal participation in society. The right of resistance, therefore, concerns the claim of social actors to the legal grounding and protection of their rights.

The concept of second coercion

Hegel views resistance as the inversion of injustice, in the tradition of John Locke, and in the sense of rebellion, of *re-bellare*, as a response to the initiator of the 'war', in the sense of the expression 'to turn the tables'. The legitimization of such an inversion as a right of necessity, *ius resistendi* as *ultima ratio*, builds upon the Kantian idea of a legitimate 'second coercion'.⁶ It is useful to draw a comparison with Kant's position in order to highlight the largely ignored significance of Hegel's innovative position for the right of resistance. An unjust and illegitimate coercion is, according to Kant, a 'hindrance or resistance to freedom'. The counter-coercion could then be viewed as the 'hindering of a hindrance to freedom', from which arises the authority to use force against the first coercion. 'The right and authorization to use coercion therefore mean one and the same thing.'⁷ Against the coercion of heteronomy, a *second* coercion seems justified: Kant speaks of 'the law of a reciprocal coercion necessarily in accord with the freedom of everyone under the principle of universal freedom'.⁸

Although Kant allowed, in the political field, for a procedure to submit grievances and a refusal to cooperate,⁹ he categorically refused the political right of resistance in its most important and significant form, that of rebellion. Consequently, a decisive element of political self-defence is missing: 'people cannot offer any resistance to the legislative head of a state that would be consistent with right', there exists 'no right to *sedition* (*seditio*), still less to *rebellion* (*rebellio*), and least of all is there a right against the head of state as an individual person (the monarch) ... on the pretext that he has abused his authority (*tyrannis*)'.¹⁰ The people should indeed bear the unbearable, for the active rebellion against the highest legislation could never be anything but unlawful. According to Kant, there would have to be a public law that allows resistance to authority. This would imply, however, that the highest legislation contains a provision stating that it is not the highest one. Consequently, any

resistance of this kind would be high treason and subject to the death penalty.¹¹ Only a type of passive, that is, 'negative', resistance would be permissible. Even if the unlawful revolution proved successful, the subjects could not refuse to honestly obey any new order that was established by unlawful means!¹² Even if the ruler makes decisions completely contrary to the law, 'subjects may indeed oppose this injustice by *complaints (gravamina)* but not by resistance'.¹³

Although Kant had conceived the subtle thought of second coercion, the protagonist of autonomy does not refer to this in the decisive passage above, but in the end prefers subservience, subalternity and paternalism; in general, he prefers the principle of a state of politically subjected citizens, who understand themselves to be subordinated, and who do not possess any right to actively abolish injustice by means of wholesale political self-defence. An improvement could not arise 'from the *bottom up*, but only from the *top down*'.¹⁴ The sovereign of the state 'has only rights against his subjects and no duties (that he can be coerced to fulfill)'.¹⁵ Hegel directly criticizes this view and defends one that is diametrically opposed to it. Nevertheless, his position is still based on the Kantian thought that second coercion is legitimate. He also refers to the principle of the unity of right and duty, which means that in a state of law no one can be above the realm of duties.¹⁶ According to this principle, the duties of the state and the rights of the citizens are to be determined just as are the rights of the state and the duties of the citizens. The critique of the principle *fiat justitia, pereat mundus* indirectly targets Kant's view on resistance.¹⁷ For Hegel, a (precisely diagnosed) state of extreme need that constitutes a state of unlawfulness gives rise to the right to *invert this situation*, that is to say, to the right to restore law, even if this takes the form of resistance to fundamental violation of rights (tyranny) or against individual violations by the state authorities. This contains the key thought for the conception of a modern 'inversive' right of necessity and right of resistance.

The stages of the inversive right of resistance

The largely ignored facet of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* discussed above deals with the series of stages of the right of reason from the perspective of the transgression against rights, and in this way implicitly unfolds the essentials of a *series of stages of 'rights of emergency or necessity'*. On every level, this state of emergency must be tested and the respective instrument of opposition must be determined – *la resistance à l'oppression*. Hegel's view, which builds on Locke

and Hume's conceptions concerning the right of resistance,¹⁸ refers both to the right of resistance against the fundamental violation of the principle of right – the keyword being 'tyranny' – and a resistance against violations of right in the constitutional order. The foundation for the legitimacy of a political right of necessity consists in the *right to oppose the first unlawful coercion with a second coercion*. The legitimacy of the second coercion, and this has been hitherto neglected, founds the *inversive right of resistance*.

At least on a structural level, Hegel follows Locke: resistance against the violation of right by state institutions (declaration of a 'state of war') is a case of *re-bellare*¹⁹; the violation of the law may itself be violated. Hegel also uses, in different terminology, the notion of a 'disturbance of the peace',²⁰ which it is admissible to oppose. It is always warranted or justified to resist the inversion of rights and all large-scale injustice. This can be viewed as a consistent principle in the *Philosophy of Right*.²¹ The state authorities and institutions must adequately manifest, that is, embody the *substance of the state* – the 'being a citizen', 'citizenship' – in which *natural law becomes the law of reason*. If this is not the case, or is only insufficiently the case, the citizenry has the irrevocable right to establish or to reconstitute this adequate form of the state. However, the different levels of opposition, of the right of necessity, of the *inversive right of resistance*, are treated unequally in the text, even though all the main elements receive attention. These are self-defence against all forms of infringement upon the basic right of personhood, 'juridical' self-defence, the right of necessity, moral resistance, resistance to a state of emergency in the sense of extreme need and poverty, and political resistance against perverted forms of the state.

The right to personhood

The point of departure is the most basic right, the principle of the *right to personhood* as the *ground of all rights* – the *Droits de l'Homme*: 'personhood is that which is the highest in man', his 'highest dignity'.²² All further determinations of the law that are required due to the abstractness of the right to personhood, and all forms of resistance against the violation of this right have their foundation in this status of the free person, in his or her self-determination, in the *unique* and *universal* right of personhood. This implies the obligation to respect *myself* and *all others* as abstract persons. The equality of subjects with regard to their abstract personhood, as an abstract identity, is for Hegel the first principle of freedom. The prohibition against violating this right follows from this, and it must be considered as inviolable: 'the dignity of

man is inviolable.' The inviolability, the unimpeachable nature, or inalienability of this basic right of the person encompasses the substantial goods of my freedom of will, my being an end in itself, my intelligence, my morality, and my understanding of the world. Domination or slavery, all subjugation and oppression, coercion of conscience or religion are impermissible and unlawful attacks on the right to personhood. 'The right to such inalienable things is imprescriptible, for the act whereby I take possession of my personality and substantial essence and make myself a responsible being with moral and religious values and capable of holding rights removes these determinations from that very externality which alone made them capable of becoming the possessions of someone else' (PR § 66 R).

Every transgression against or violation of this basic right is a first coercion, that is, an injustice, against which the affected persons can legitimately and proportionally defend themselves. All infringements of this kind of the fundamental right allow for a second coercion, resistance as an infringement against prior infringements, that is, the affirmation of the inversion of the first, unlawful coercion. In this way, actions that aim to overthrow, to invert the conditions that violate the basic right to personhood are justified and authorized, and the right to resist is established. 'When their externality is superseded in this way, the determination of time and all other reasons which can be derived from my previous consent or acceptance lose their validity' (PR § 66). Every slave, every servant exists in a state of 'emergency' (*Not*), of a lack of recognition and respect for his or her person. He 'has the right to break his bonds at all times', the slave 'has an absolute right to free himself' (VRP IV 239, 251).

This line of argumentation helps Hegel to clearly define in an abstract-formal way the basic foundational element of the right of resistance, which then needs to be further determined in the relevant higher spheres of action. The right of self-defence against a first coercion never expires, it is inalienable and has absolute validity. 'This return on my part into myself, whereby I make myself existent as Idea, as a person with rights and morality, supersedes the previous relationship and the wrong which I and the other person have done to my concept and reason' (PR § 66). Hegel also expresses this inversion of an 'emergency situation', of a personal state of exception, with the set phrase of the legitimacy of a 'retraction of the alienation' (*Zurücknehmens der Entäußerung*) of personality. As will be argued further on, this clear plea for legitimate resistance in states of emergency relates not only to premodern social conditions but invariably also to possible restorations of oppression, subjugation and discrimination in modern societies.

Self-defence

Self-defence (*Notwehr*), as it is understood in formal law, means legitimate coercion against injustice. It is preceded by a violation of the law by another person, for example, by an act of physical violence. The attacked and threatened person can lawfully resist in the form of a force that is appropriate to the violence of the attack. In this way, an ‘inversion’ of right takes place: If the other person illegitimately uses violence, I can violate the state’s monopoly on force and thus infringe the ban on violence by defending myself in an appropriate manner. This ‘inversion’ or ‘reversal’ characterizes all forms of emergency law. A deed always follows from the violation of a certain right that inverts the existing principle of right. *Self-defence* is the inversion of the rejection of violence.

The right of necessity

The *right of necessity* (*Notrecht*) is based on the *right to self-preservation*. When one’s life is seriously in danger, one is in danger of *losing all rights*, which is in fact a threat to *the existence of freedom*. Accordingly, formal right is annulled by a higher right, the right of necessity. This right proceeds from acute states of emergency such as being in danger of starving. The petty theft of food, for instance, is a right, if it helps the person to avoid starvation. Both the person and the right ‘must have life’ (PR § 128 annotation [German text only]). The right of necessity is thus a basic right, a *human right* in the universal sense of a guarantee of *personhood*, a right to physical integrity, nourishment, protection from illness and from the destruction of the means of one’s livelihood.²³ In the German constitution, this is enshrined as follows: ‘Every person shall have the right to life and physical integrity.’²⁴ Abstract liberalism, by contrast, is based on the rigorism and fundamentalism of formal right, especially property right, the limits of which are ignored – abstract liberalism considers a starving person stealing bread to be theft and, therefore, an injustice.²⁵

Moral resistance

Both the *moral right of resistance* and the *white lie* (*Not-Lüge*), the right to provide false information, are based on the violation of a subject’s right by a community or state, and thus on a state of emergency. The latter legitimates a form of *moral self-defence* that expresses itself by rejecting and ‘deceiving’ the existing order. In this vein, moral self-defence points to the critical dimension of morality.

In line with Hegel, we could speak of a right of morality and conscience, of a *Socrates principle* on the one hand, and of the *white lie* on the other. Socrates symbolizes moral resistance, since he expresses a principle that undermines the existing order. He demands that the existing order be legitimized by means of one's own subjectivity, through its impartial examination from the standpoint of a singular self or I. With reference to PR § 138, we can discern the validity of *moral resistance* also with regard to the state. There it is discussed in terms of a sublation of the Socrates principle: decisions to act in the modern world are based on the 'depths of self-consciousness', on the 'I want' (*Ich will*). The reasons for these actions are not to be found in oracles or mantic authorities, but rather *within* the human being as such. The forms of *the absolute legitimacy of self-consciousness* and of *free thinking* provide us with a 'sufficient condition to appoint the subject the guardian of the constitution, and to provide it with a right to resist, especially since Hegel knows very well that the state is in need of such a guardian.'²⁶

The need for moral justification arises when an individual, a particular citizen, demands that the existing order be justified. If such a justification cannot be provided, the individual begins to doubt the basic principles of the existing state or even to reject them entirely. Accordingly, the individual orients her actions not only on the basis of positive law and the existing order, but also reverses this order based on her inner authority, which is now based on comprehending thought. This is also the basis for world-historical 'reversals', for historical revolutions, which are only valid as such if they present an action after a preceding injustice, that is, in the sense of a 'second action' of *historical self-defence* – Hegel's paradigm was the French Revolution. Furthermore, the moral subject has the right, in a certain context of injustice, to supply false information, for example, in a dictatorship. It is not accurate to describe these acts as lies, but rather as upright actions. One particularly interesting case of a white lie, of inversion and moral resistance may be found in a novel by Jurek Becker, where the character of Jakob resists the Nazi dictatorship by providing false information.²⁷

Resistance to poverty

A state of extreme poverty legitimates a right to resist in the sense of a restoration of right, that is, the right to participate equally in civil society. As mentioned, the burgeoning gulf between great wealth and severe poverty gives rise to the *emergency right of the poor and discriminated to resist and rebel*. However, the

aim of this right is to *reestablish the basic constitution of civil society* rather than destroying it. Therefore, at each of the three levels of the development of the concept of right and freedom, this right of resistance must be determined against possible violations of this right. The right of avoiding abject poverty within civil society is based on (a) the right to the integrity of the person that is laid down in the category of abstract right, and the justification of self-defence, and (b) the principles of moral resistance and the right of necessity. Both *self-defence* and *moral resistance*, as well as the right of necessity and the right to resist poverty, are always a *re-action*, a 'second' action, the reaction to an existing injustice in a state of exception.

It should be recalled that here we are talking about resistance to blatant offences against the law, about the *reclaiming* of rights. With respect to civil society, this in no way concerns the right to found *another* society.²⁸ If the constitutional principles of civil society are being violated on a massive scale, or do not exist – that is, the right to equal participation in civil society – there arises the right to the *restoration or reclamation of these founding principles*. For Hegel, there is not in any sense a right to overthrow, a right to abolish these foundations, because these are the very *conditions that make freedom possible*.

Political resistance

With regard to the theme of *political resistance*, Hegel also consistently relies on the principle of the *legitimacy of a second coercion*, although this is not made explicitly clear – this can be considered to be a result of Hegel's political caution and the camouflaging of his position because of censorship.²⁹ In any case, the thesis that Hegel 'does not provide for rights of defence and resistance' requires a critical examination.³⁰ In fact, Hegel deals with the *political state of exception* and the *political right to resistance* only briefly and indirectly in two ways: first, in the context of the 'guarantees' of a state constitution based on freedom, which can be ensured through intelligent institutions and free citizens; second, with respect to the 'disturbance of the peace' in relation to the discrepancy that may arise between the self-conscious thinking of citizens and the existing institutions, which may fail to live up to the level of consciousness of the citizens.³¹ This issue is further discussed with respect to forms of decay in the state, in connection with the debates about murdering tyrants,³² and most likely also in response to the positions of Locke and Hume. But it remains decisive that here the *legitimacy of the inversion of injustice to justice*, the *justification of second coercion* and the right to political resistance in any form must be conceived on the foundation

of the basic logic of Hegel's thought. In this sense, Hegel's view of freedom is fundamentally directed against repression, arbitrary rule and tyranny.³³ There is no right of resistance that results in the *dissolution* of the modern structure of right as it is conceived in the *Philosophy of Right*, because that would be an insurrection against reason and freedom, and therefore not a *legitimate* resistance, but a rebellion oriented in a backwards direction, a form of restoration, which however is always possible.³⁴

But, as already remarked, at the same time there exists a *right to resistance against the violations of the principle of modern freedom*, of the individual freedom of individuals in all their dimensions, a right to correct the shortcomings of modern society, a *right to indignation at regressions from the modern principle of right*; that is, the right to revolt against recently established totalitarian systems, against ochlocratic and oligarchic forms, and so on. Such a right does not necessarily have to be explicitly expressed; it follows of necessity from Hegel's understanding of right and freedom. In this way, Hegel can be read as a resolute anti-restorative thinker. Against all attempts to retreat from the principle of freedom there is a right to resistance and revolt, both in the sphere of civil society and in that of the state. These protests are to be seen as models of legally permitted action, of *social and political self-defence*. The right to resistance and revolt in order to secure and restore the foundations of civil society and liberty is predominantly a *political right*, because the possibilities within civil society remain limited. Because of this, it is situated in the sphere of the state, but still it should always be considered as a form of right (in the Hegelian sense). As with the right of necessity (e.g., the petty theft of food), one should definitely take into account that deciding whether or not there is an emergency, or a state of exception (say, acute starvation), remains very difficult to determine in the political sphere, and a thorough assessment is always necessary. The main conditions for the legitimacy of resistance and rebellion would be, first, the blatant and permanent violation of the laws that protect basic rights ('if a long train of actions show the councils all tending that way', as Locke puts it³⁵); second, the assessment of the legitimacy of the indignation of the persons resisting (the 'Socrates principle'); and third, the existence of a situation that poses a general threat to all citizens.³⁶ These conditions hold especially also for the murder of a tyrant, which can often have other negative consequences.³⁷

In addition, in Hegel's account the state and the governed are protected from the abuse of power by the government and state officials through an 'internal protection' (collegiate structures), a protection from 'the very top' (the final decision maker), and also a protection 'from below' against the subjective

arbitrariness of the ruling powers, and therefore through special rights of resistance against government institutions (although these rights are mainly focused on collectives such as corporations, associations and communities). The corrective function of the legislative power is largely absent here. The *Philosophy of Right* also discusses vertical structures of authority, in the sense of a form of 'top down' and 'bottom up' organization. Hegel considers the 'actual strength' of states to consist in well-organized professional bodies, communities and cities. Corporate structures are capable of connecting the general interest closely with the particular interest, of protecting the citizens against unlawful infringements and enabling resistance (PR § 290 A).

According to Hume, there is a legitimate political right of resistance in situations of 'exception', in states of emergency: 'There will be no crime or injustice in our resisting the more violent effects of supreme power.'³⁸ In a state of emergency, for example in case of tyranny or dictatorship, breaking the law of the state can be seen as a right, as a defence against 'the enemies of public well-being.' This resistance cannot be condemned: 'It is certain that in all our notions of morals we never entertain such an absurdity as that of passive obedience, and always allow for resistance against the more flagrant cases of tyranny and oppression', because people owe 'obedience to government merely on account of the public interest.'³⁹ The citizens not only have the right to free themselves from tyranny but also to prevent it.⁴⁰ With this, Hegel can concur: someone who is politically oppressed is robbed of his political rights, and he is allowed to rectify this robbery, or better, this injustice, to defend himself and to reclaim his rights in the sense of a second coercion. In as far as he falls back into the state of a disenfranchised subject (a 'slave'⁴¹), he has the right to break free of his bonds and reclaim his rights as a *citizen*. For Hegel, the enslavement and servitude of the human being count as 'the absolute crime', because the personality of the slave or servant is negated in all its manifestations.⁴² It is the right of inversion against the unlawful inversion.

The political right of resistance is based on the pillars of the right of necessity of the previous steps; it entails different forms, and culminates in the *right to rebellion*.⁴³ Throughout his life, Hegel saw the French Revolution as a legitimate form of resistance against the old structure of injustice: 'The development of Spirit unaccompanied by a corresponding development of institutions, so that a contradiction arises between the two, is the source not only of discontent but also of revolutions.'⁴⁴ In the state of society, deprivation immediately takes the shape of injustice (PR § 244 A), which gives rise to the right to *moral self-defence*; the latter exceeds the sphere of civil society and also concerns the political sphere.

Insofar as the substantial foundations of the liberal constitution of the state are attacked or even destroyed, the individual citizens and the people in a society may take up their right to political resistance – always with the goal of restoring a rational constitution. On this point, the preamble to the American Declaration of Independence stipulates: ‘That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government.’ In accordance with the correlation of rights and duties, which Hegel always emphasizes, it is to be further noted that it is not only one’s right, but also one’s duty to remove an unjust government. Likewise, since 1968, in addition to the highly problematic emergency regulations (*Notstandsverordnungen*), the German constitution includes the juridical codification of the right to rebellion: ‘Against all those who seek to abolish this order, all Germans have the right of resistance, when no other forms of redress are available.’⁴⁵

This duality entails that the political emergency, the state of exception, can be caused both by political institutions as well as by the citizens, in which case each side can legitimately make use of forcible, ‘tyrannical’ means with regard to the other side. In the former situation this may take the form of, for example, resistance of the citizens to the unreasonable regime by storming the Bastille, the forceful occupation of government buildings, police stations or secret service centres, politically motivated nationwide strikes, declarations concerning the overthrow of the old government and the proclamation of a new order; in the latter case, state authorities may offer resistance when the ‘existence of the whole is compromised’,⁴⁶ for example, in case of the unlawful intimidation of the reasonable order ‘from below’. In this sense, a democratically legitimate state power would have had the right to prevent, from above and with forcible means, the takeover of the National Socialists – clearly representatives of dictatorship and despotism – with the aim of avoiding tyranny.

For Hegel, knowledge of the truly universal, that is, an assessment of the existing political order *supported by knowledge*, remains crucial. The criteria for such an objective evaluation are the fundamental elements of freedom and the forms in which freedom is realized, that is, the law of reason and the constitution based on freedom, as they are developed in the *Philosophy of Right*. Without restriction, despotism is denounced as a state of lawlessness, as an *inner state of emergency* of the state, against which political self-defence has to be admissible. In such a case citizens do not merely request special rights, but rather demand their right as the right of the *actual sovereign*. In this sense there exists a right to revolution, against the *inversions of modern statehood*. The demands of those

who resist politically are characterized by the slogan *Wir sind das Volk* ('We are the People'), which expresses the essence of the German revolution of 1989, which was initiated, carried and successfully realized by East German citizens. It was the result of peaceful resistance by citizens under favourable historical circumstances.⁴⁷

The inversive right of resistance thus includes the determination of a state of need or emergency at levels of increasing generality, and of a justified struggle against need and oppression: the various stages of self-defence, that of second coercion and that of the right to resistance. The idea of a second coercion has to be conceived at all levels in the development of the concept of freedom and right, up to the sphere of the state (including in international law and world history). This account clearly shows that the accusations of paternalism, statism, excessive institutionalism and the essentialization or sacralization of the state levelled against Hegel's theory⁴⁸ are exaggerated and do not get at the core of his idea of the state.

Conclusion: State of exception and second coercion

Of course, political states of emergency are essentially based on the situation in civil society as the state of need and of the understanding, a system of mutual dependence, of ethical life lost in its extremes. The self-inflicted and burgeoning gap between rich and poor threatens the foundations of civil society and signals an excess, a Hegelian sublation of this form – which would give a rational shape to the domain of the understanding. Civil society is pushed to go beyond itself, *not* towards *another order*, but towards its own ground, which is a rational form of society based on conceptual thinking, that is, towards a state of freedom.

Civil society does not have its *own* sufficient means of countering these existential threats. As a result, it is a breeding ground for various forms of despotism and fundamentalism, forms built on an attitude of injustice flowing from a lack of education or half-education that can threaten freedom. The most dangerous of these *unfree* forms is that of tyranny, because here the rights of citizens are in no way sufficiently protected, but rather extraordinarily threatened.⁴⁹ In this context, Hegel's repeated and constant emphasis on *the right to education* becomes especially illuminating: no modern order, no democracy, can thrive without educated citizens – 'the ignorant is unfree'. Developing the universality of thought undoubtedly supplies a vital instrument against

inhumanity. In unjust societies, *spiritual and intellectual impoverishment* always reigns supreme; their crimes are based on fundamental violations of the *concept* of right. Philosophy has the responsibility to bring these violations to light; this is *philosophy's right to intellectual self-defence and resistance*. The knowledge and education of citizens is the only sustainable way of guaranteeing resistance against all forms of inhumanity.

From a Hegelian perspective, the codification of a legal state of exception (constitutionally defined emergency powers, emergency legislation) would be the dissolution of the legal order, the aporia of positive emergency law. Following Carl Schmitt, Agamben once again raises the question of how such a suspension of the constitution may still be contained in the legal system, if the defining characteristic of the state of exception is the (total or partial) suspension of the legal order.⁵⁰ The essence of emergency law is 'to stand outside the legal system and yet belong to it', Schmitt claims. The dilemma lies in the fact that any state of emergency declared to save the democratic state could – with equal probability – be misused for its destruction, because chartered rights of freedom are suspended and the separation of powers (and thus the rational structure of the state) is partially dissolved. The supposed rescuing of freedom would then be 'reversed', it would be turned into its opposite (into partial dictatorial measures and powers) and would thereby ultimately threaten or even destroy the state as an organism of freedom. The emergency laws in Germany entail the aporia that fundamental rights may be restricted, but constitutional amendments are prohibited. Accordingly, only *resistance by the citizens* (whether it is codified or not) can prevent a coup. The citizens of the state in question then place themselves outside of its positive lawful order but have recourse to the law of reason. Under a dictatorship carrying out mass murder, terror and war, it is reasonable to form resistance groups, to provide citizens with information, to sabotage the economy, desert from the security forces, or in the last resort, to employ violence in order to assassinate the tyrant.

Only *educated citizens* can be the force to guarantee a free constitution – *education, in an absolute sense, is liberation*. This view of freedom and emancipation understands education as the 'immanent aspect of the Absolute' and proves its '*infinite value*' (PR § 187). The legitimacy of the state and of political resistance has its source in the *law of reason*. The existing positive law must be measured by the criteria of a theoretical constitution of freedom; ultimately, the *nervus probandi* of a free state can only be *conceptual thought*.⁵¹

Notes

- 1 G.W.F. Hegel, *Frühe Schriften. Gesammelte Werke* 1 (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1989), 80.
- 2 Regarding indignation, see PR § 244 A.
- 3 G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts. Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, ed. Dieter Henrich (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983), 20.
- 4 In contrast, Schnädelbach asserts that Hegel restricted the right of resistance to inner resistance. See Schnädelbach, 'Hegels praktische Philosophie. Ein Kommentar der Texte in der Reihenfolge ihrer Entstehung', in *Hegels Philosophie*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2000), 241.
- 5 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Discourse on Political Economy', in *Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21.
- 6 This point is essentially based on the discussion in Klaus Vieweg, *Das Denken der Freiheit. Hegels Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 2012).
- 7 Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 56–8.
- 8 Ibid., 58.
- 9 Ibid., 133: 'only a *negative* resistance, that is, a *refusal* of the people (in parliament) to accede to every demand the government puts forth. . . '.
- 10 Ibid., 131.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., 133. Kenneth R. Westphal provides a detailed analysis of Kant and the right of resistance: 'Metaphysische und pragmatische Prinzipien in Kants Lehre von der Gehorsamspflicht gegen den Staat', in D. Hüning and B. Tuschling, *Recht, Staat und Völkerrecht bei Immanuel Kant* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1998), 171–202.
- 13 Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 130.
- 14 Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 167 (translation altered).
- 15 Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 130.
- 16 Some accounts regarding the monarch in the *Grundlinien* are closer to the Kantian approach.
- 17 The state of emergency holds for Hegel as a 'ground of justification', this 'principle, which is new and surprising for his contemporaries, is pronounced with maximal severity', and, as it seems 'polemically against Kant (not *ius aequivocum*, not fairness, but law)'. Paul Bockelmann, *Hegels Notstandslehre* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1935), 22.
- 18 According to Ludwig Siep, Hegel accepts the corresponding position of Hobbes. See Siep's commentary in John Locke, *Zweite Abhandlung über die Regierung* [Second Treatise on Government], ed. Ludwig Siep (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007), 310.

- 19 See also: Walter Euchner, *John Locke zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 1996) 119–23; Siep's commentary in Locke, *Zweite Abhandlung*, 372ff.
- 20 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 270.
- 21 According to Thomas Petersen, 'in the state of the Hegelian *Philosophy of Right*, justified resistance [is] possible'; Hegel recognizes 'a right to resistance in principle.' See 'Widerstandsrecht und Recht auf Revolution in Hegels Rechtsphilosophie', *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 82 (1996): 473, 475. However, Petersen fails to consider the crucial notion of a second coercion. On the subject of emergency law and state of emergency in Hegel, also see Bockelmann, *Hegels Notstandslehre*.
- 22 G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts. Berlin 1819/1820. Nachgeschrieben von J.R. Ringier*, eds. E. Angehrn, M. Bondeli and H.N. Seelmann (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 2000), 15.
- 23 A debtor has a right to keep what he needs for nourishment and clothing and the means to guarantee a continued existence (for instance, the instruments of a workman or the farming tools of a farmer). This right holds even if it violates the property right of the creditor – *beneficium competentiae*. As soon as the person who steals food out of necessity or the debtor have financial means at their disposal again, property rights come back into force. Thus, the right of necessity does not destroy the formal right to property but rather temporarily suspends it for the duration of a state of exception.
- 24 Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, art. 2 (2). Available at [<https://www.btg-bestellservice.de/pdf/80201000.pdf>].
- 25 An abstract, 'procedural' liberalism constructs an insurmountable opposition between the rights of an individual and the rights of the collective.
- 26 Petersen, 'Widerstandsrecht und Recht auf Revolution in Hegels Rechtsphilosophie', 478.
- 27 See the novel *Jakob der Lügner* by Jurek Becker, 1969. For a detailed discussion of inversion in the context of dictatorship, see Vieweg, *Das Denken der Freiheit*, 183–215.
- 28 Ibid. Of course, this does not involve formal-abstract right, nor the claiming of this right, but the right to well-being in civil society, which can only be achieved politically.
- 29 Petersen calls this the 'remaining implicit' of the issue of the right to resistance. 'Widerstandsrecht und Recht auf Revolution in Hegels Rechtsphilosophie', 475.
- 30 See Ludwig Siep, *Aktualität und Grenzen der praktischen Philosophie Hegels* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 2010), 112.
- 31 Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, 270.
- 32 'The right to resist originates in the right to resist a tyrant, an illegitimate ruler.' Siep, *Aktualität und Grenzen*, 112.

- 33 Hume emphasizes that ‘when there is enormous tyranny and oppression it is lawful to take arms even against the supreme power: government is merely something that people invented for mutual advantage and security, so when it stops having that tendency there is no longer any natural or moral obligation to obey it’. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, ed. Jonathan Bennett, 291 [available online: <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/hume>]. This right must be ascribed to the citizens of Cambodia under Pol Pot, or to the citizens of Chile under Pinochet, as well as to all citizens living under dictatorships and other inhumane regimes.
- 34 The dictatorships of the twentieth century represent restorative, pre-modern forms of this kind.
- 35 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (New Haven: Yale, 2003), 193.
- 36 See Siep’s commentary in Locke, *Zweite Abhandlung*, 372.
- 37 The members of the resistance group of ‘20 July’ have extensively discussed this set of problems. I am grateful to Dieter Henrich for drawing my attention to them. Hume already pleads for the careful assessment of advantages and disadvantages of the practical application of resistance, cf. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, 287. Although ‘the general principle’ of the right to resistance is ‘authorized’, ‘neither laws nor even philosophy can establish any particular rules that would tell us when resistance is lawful.’ *Ibid.*, 291.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 286.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Locke, *Two Treatises*, 197.
- 41 Locke too refers to the status of the slave (*ibid.*).
- 42 Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, 97.
- 43 Losurdo maintains that Hegel ‘decisively rejects the right of resistance’. On the other hand, Losurdo agrees with Hegel’s reflections on the right of necessity. Domenico Losurdo, *Hegel und die Freiheit der Modernen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2000), 113–22, esp. 119. The thesis formulated by Siep concerning the absence of rights of defence and resistance in Hegel, of insufficient protection for basic rights, does not appear to be justified, because through popular assemblies, citizens ‘are themselves enabled to watch over the implementation and protection of their freedom’. Gertrude Lübke-Wolff, ‘Über das Fehlen von Grundrechten in Hegels Rechtsphilosophie’, in *Hegels Rechtsphilosophie im Zusammenhang der europäischen Verfassungsgeschichte*, ed. Otto Pöggeler and Hans-Christian Lucas (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1986), 421–46. With regard to resisting poverty, Henrich writes: ‘There is no other place in Hegel’s work where he does not just understand revolution as a historical fact and necessity, but rather derives and explains a right to revolution on the basis of a systematic analysis of an institution

that existed also in his own time.' Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts. Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, ed. Dieter Henrich (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983), 20.

- 44 Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, 269.
- 45 Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, art. 20 (4).
- 46 Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe* III (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1987), 237.
- 47 One of the most important protagonists of this insurrection, Matthias Platzeck, rejects the trivializing talk of a 'turn [*Wende*]' and rightly argues for the designation 'peaceful revolution' as one of the most 'successful contributions to European history of the twentieth century'. For a vivid presentation of the revolutionary process and its analysis, see Matthias Platzeck, *Zukunft braucht Herkunft. Deutsche Fragen, ostdeutsche Antworten* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2009).
- 48 L. Siep bases the thesis of a 'sacralized' and 'inflated' concept of the state in Hegel on the limited power of the legislature, the conception of a hereditary monarchy, the absence of a right of resistance and the idea of offensive war. See *Aktualität und Grenzen der praktischen Philosophie Hegels*, 112. This criticism of Hegel appears to be untenable, as soon as one is prepared, following the logic of Hegel's thought, to put certain passages in the *Philosophy of Right* into context, and to reinterpret them on the basis of the logical course of his thought, taking into account that a number of passages in the chapter on the state were written under the influence of the censor.
- 49 Hegel, 'Rechtslehre für die Unterklasse', in *Werke* 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 248–9; for Hegel, tyranny or despotism are situations in which there is an absence of rights.
- 50 Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- 51 This text was translated from the original German by Henny Blomme, Elise Frketich, Emma Moormann, Gesa Wellmann, Antonia Wilckens and David W. Wood.

Does the Rabble Resist Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*?

Louis Carré

Non resistere malo

Matthew 5:39

Gilles Deleuze has compared the art of commenting on the history of philosophy with that of *collage* in modern painting: 'In the history of philosophy, a commentary should act as a veritable double and bear the maximal modification appropriate to a double. (One imagines a *philosophically* bearded Hegel, a *philosophically* clean-shaven Marx, in the same way as a moustached Mona Lisa).'¹ Commenting on Hegel as if he had worn a long, grey beard is a temptation to which one easily falls prey. One example of such a *collage* is offered by recent commentators who have drawn a parallel between Hegel's 'rabble' (*Pöbel*) and Marx's 'proletariat'.² To them, the Hegelian rabble and the Marxian proletariat, if not identical, share at least the common feature of embodying the 'negativity' of modern bourgeois capitalist societies. Both the rabble and the proletariat are seen as symptoms of the imminent internal collapse of the societies that once gave birth to them. As Adrian Johnston writes: 'Taking into account the multiple connections between Hegel and Marx, the Hegelian *Pöbel* might very well represent, within the confines of the *Philosophy of Right*, those who will unchain themselves one fine day in order to expedite capitalism's twilight labor of digging its own grave.'³ My aim in this chapter is to resist the temptation of presenting a 'philosophically bearded Hegel'. Not that I desperately want to promote a 'philosophically clean-shaven Hegel', but my intention here is to show how falling prey to this temptation may lead us to fail to acknowledge the small – and therefore essential – differences between the Hegelian rabble and the Marxian proletariat. The difference between Marx and Hegel can be summarized in the following theses, which I will develop further over the course of this chapter. Unlike the proletariat, the rabble is a social phenomenon and not a revolutionary subject. And whereas the programme of the young Marx was

to realize philosophy by way of the proletarian subject, the rabble appears as a phenomenon that resists Hegel's speculative philosophy of right from the inside.

In order to reopen the old Hegel-Marx debate, in the next three sections I will concentrate mostly on two interrelated issues in Hegel. The first issue concerns the place of the rabble within the systematic framework of the *Philosophy of Right*, published in 1820.⁴ To what extent does the phenomenon of the rabble resist Hegel's philosophical system of right as a whole? The second issue has to do with the possibility of finding in Hegel a highly paradoxical right to resist that is attached to the same rabble. In which sense is there a right to resist associated with the rabble, considering that the rabble is merely a social and historical phenomenon and not a juridical, moral, or even ethical subject? Those two issues (the rabble as resisting the philosophical concept of right and the rabble as having a very peculiar right of resistance) are – as I will argue – deeply connected with one another. For it is only as a phenomenon that resists *from the inside* the systematic framework of the *Philosophy of Right* that the rabble has a right of resistance which finds its ultimate 'justification' (*Rechtfertigung*) *at the very limit* of Hegel's speculative philosophy of right, namely before the 'world court' of history.

The phenomenon of the rabble

In a well-known passage from the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel uses the term 'rabble' (*das Pöbel*) to designate what is essentially a merely contingent social phenomenon, rather than a kind of collective subject:

When a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living – which automatically regulates itself at the level necessary for a member of the society in question – that feeling of right, integrity [*Rechtlichkeit*], and honour which comes from supporting oneself by one's own activity and work is lost. This leads to the creation (*Erzeugung*) of a *rabble*, which in turn makes it much easier for disproportionate wealth to be concentrated in a few hands. (PR § 244)

The family, the corporations and the state, discussed at length in the other parts of the last section of the *Philosophy of Right*, are collective subjects in the sense that they act on the basis of the rights they have been entitled with. Compared to these collective subjects, the rabble is a phenomenon that has been 'generated' (*erzeugt*) by the 'sinking' of 'a large mass of people ... below the level of a certain standard of living'. Being 'generated' already excludes the rabble from being

an independent subject. Like any other contingent phenomenon, the rabble depends on something other in order to exist, whereas collective subjects such as the family, the corporations and the state exist on the basis of their own rights. As Hegel suggests in the next paragraph, the main cause explaining the 'formation of the rabble' lies in the 'excess of wealth' and of 'poverty' that characterizes modern bourgeois societies (PR § 245). As a phenomenon, the rabble finds its foundation in the polarization of civil society into the two extremes of wealth and poverty. Even though its capitalist market economy 'automatically regulates itself' most of the time, modern civil society is permanently balanced between an 'excess of wealth' and an 'excess of poverty'. Taking a closer look at these famous passages, it seems that Hegel does not offer a proper explanation for the social and economic inequalities that occur within the sphere of civil society. In his view, 'inequalities in resources' are but a 'necessary result' (PR § 201) of the way civil society and its self-regulated market economy function, more or less effectively, as a whole. The rabble is 'generated' under the condition of an 'excess' of those social inequalities which are, in fact, structurally embedded in civil society. Showing less concern for the economic causes that might be able to explain such a process of polarization, Hegel is interested in scrutinizing the effects this process has on 'a large mass of people' which, when subject to this condition, may or may not form a rabble. In short, economic and social inequalities are understood by Hegel only as the necessary – but not sufficient – condition for the emergence of the rabble.

If it is not ultimately grounded in economic circumstances, what, then, is the root cause of the phenomenon of the rabble? In the same passage, Hegel indicates that the rabble is characterized by the 'loss' of any 'feeling of right, integrity, and honour'. The 'formation of the rabble' has to do primarily with people losing the sentiment of right that is normally associated with their membership in civil society. Only the loss of the feeling of right (*der Verlust des Gefühles des Rechts*) is constitutive for such a 'mass of people' to form a rabble. As such, the phenomenon of the rabble is above all a matter of mentality and subjective disposition. Given the conditions of social inequalities produced by modern civil society, the rabble *may or may not* appear depending on how the 'large mass of people' will relate to those conditions. The mere possibility for the rabble to emerge under certain conditions is part of its contingency as a phenomenon. The rabble is not only dependent as a phenomenon on something other than itself in order to exist (the polarization of civil society into two extremes); it is also contingent in that its preconditions do not necessarily suffice for its own subjective disposition to emerge. By focusing on its mentality and subjective disposition rather than on

its economic preconditions, Hegel thus refuses to reduce the rabble to material poverty alone. As he claims: 'Poverty in itself does not reduce people to a rabble; a rabble is created only by the disposition associated with poverty, by inward rebellion against the rich, against society, the government, etc.' (PR § 244 A). Strictly speaking, it is the way in which people *subjectively* relate to their pre-given social and economic conditions rather than those conditions themselves that is salient for the rabble to appear. If the rabble's mentality and its subjective disposition are irreducible to its social and economic preconditions, then the loss of the 'feeling of right, integrity, and honour' is not exclusive to those people who suffer from material poverty. In one of his Berlin lectures, Hegel even argues that the 'poor' rabble coexists with a 'rich' rabble.⁵ Both the 'rich' and the 'poor', the two extremes of the process of social polarization, can be considered to be parts of the rabble.⁶ While occupying two extremes in the distribution of resources, the 'rich' and the 'poor' can adopt the same rabble mentality, which is coupled with the loss of the feeling of right.

The subjective disposition proper to the rabble is in itself profoundly ambivalent.⁷ The German expression used by Hegel when he speaks about the rabble's mentality (*der Verlust des Gefühles des Rechts*) can indeed be understood in two separate ways, both of which, however, appear to be constitutive for generating a rabble. On the one hand, the loss of the feeling of right refers to 'a large mass of people' having been deprived of their rights and their prerogatives as members of civil society. This is mostly the case for members of the 'poor' rabble, who have the feeling of being socially and economically excluded from ethically mediated interactions with other members of civil society. As Hegel puts it: 'Self-consciousness appears driven to the point where it no longer has any rights, where freedom has no existence' (PR 453). On the other hand, the loss of their rights leads the same people to abandon the sense of righteousness (*Rechtschaffenheit*) that is usually coupled with the social role of being a 'bourgeois' (PR § 190 R): 'Because the individual's freedom has no existence, the recognition of universal freedom disappears' (PR 453). The disappearance of the recognition of universal freedom means that those people who are forming a rabble cease to recognize the universal principle of freedom instituted by and in civil society, because their particular freedom has ceased to be recognized. As a side-effect, their feeling of injustice and social exclusion is accompanied by 'the renunciation of shame and honour', shame and honour being, as it were, 'the subjective bases of society' (PR § 245 R). By losing their rights as 'bourgeois', the people who form the rabble show not only a lack of self-respect but also shamelessness and impudence in the way they act towards and think of other

members of society. If the loss of the feeling of right in the first sense referred to the 'poor' rabble, the second includes both the 'poor' and the 'rich'. The 'rich' rabble can be just as impudent and shameless in the way it acts and thinks as the 'poor' rabble. The two extremes of civil society finally come together in the subjective disposition that characterizes the rabble as such. Hegel makes this point clear in his lectures:

On the one hand, poverty is the ground of the rabble-mentality, the non-recognition of right; on the other hand, the rabble disposition also appears where there is wealth. The rich man thinks that he can buy anything, because he knows himself as the power of the particularity of self-consciousness. Thus wealth can lead to the same mockery and shamelessness that we find in the poor rabble. The disposition of the master over the slave is the same as that of the slave. ... These two sides, poverty and wealth, thus constitute the corruption [*Verderben*] of civil society. (PR 454)

These two senses of the loss of the feeling of right are combined in the German word *Unrecht*, which signifies both a situation of injustice and a situation of complete non-right. *Unrecht* in the sense of injustice or wrong prevails when an institutionally recognized right has been injured, whereas *Unrecht* in the sense of non-right appears when no rights whatsoever have yet been instituted, or existing rights have been abolished. The first sense of *Unrecht* refers to a juridical situation wherein rights have been instituted and are guaranteed by society, the second to an anomic situation of violence and non-right similar in shape to that of the pre-social 'state of nature'. These two opposed meanings of *Unrecht* are confounded in the loss of the feeling of right that characterizes the subjective disposition of the rabble. As soon as the rights associated with membership in civil society are systematically injured, it seems unavoidable that those people who have been wronged will develop anti-ethical attitudes, such as shamelessness and unrighteousness against other members of civil society. The feeling of being systematically wronged as a member of civil society easily changes into the feeling that, within civil society, no rights seem to prevail and therefore have to be respected.

Hegel exposes the profound ambivalence of the phenomenon of the rabble when he defines its subjective disposition in terms of 'the conscience of the absence of right under the precondition of right' (*das Bewußtsein der Rechtlosigkeit unter Voraussetzung des Rechts*).⁸ A 'wrong' (*Unrecht*) can only be perceived as a lack of justice where some rights have been recognized 'under the precondition of right'. As Hegel claims, 'no one can assert a right against

nature, but within the conditions of society hardship at once assumes the form of a wrong inflicted on this or that class' (PR § 244 A). When social and economic injustices systematically affect 'a large mass of people', the rights and duties once instituted by and within civil society slowly but surely lose their meaning and the 'conscience of the absence of right' emerges. In such cases, the juridical situation civil society is supposed to guarantee to all its members tends to collapse into a situation of 'non-right' (*Unrecht*) similar to that of the 'state of nature'. It is important to note, however, that Hegel does not say that with the emergence of the rabble civil society returns to some pre-social 'state of the nature';⁹ firstly because 'a rabble arises chiefly in a developed civil society' (PR 453), and secondly because the 'state of nature' is in Hegel's view but a pure hypothesis, a prehistorical situation that never existed as such, 'of which nothing truer can be said than that *one ought to depart from it*' (EPS §502 R; see also PR § 57 R). However, some 'remnants of the state of nature' (PR § 200 R) are still to be found in modern civil society. Hegel even sometimes implicitly refers to Hobbes' account of the state of nature when he defines civil society as 'the field of conflict in which the private interest of each individual comes up against that of everyone else' (PR § 289 R). The phenomenon of the rabble is precisely one example – together with the 'state of nature' that prevails between nation-states (PR § 333) – of this 'remnant'. Its profound ambiguity between right and non-right, between the feeling of injustice and unrighteousness, explains why Hegel sees in the phenomenon of the rabble a tendency towards the inner 'dissolution of civil society'.¹⁰ Indeed, what best characterizes the phenomenon of the rabble in the end is the tendency at work in civil society towards its own self-corruption and self-dissolution: 'In these opposites and their complexity, civil society affords a spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruption common to both' (PR § 185).

In which sense does the phenomenon of the rabble lead to 'ethical corruption' but also to some extent, since civil society is itself an institutionalized sphere of the concept of right, to the dissolution of the philosophical notion of right? Being a member of civil society means to consider oneself and to be considered as 'the son of civil society', with all the rights and duties that are tied to the recognition of a social status. By recognizing each of its members as one of its 'sons', civil society, like the natural family, 'has as many claims upon him as he has rights in relation to it' (PR § 238). Being a sort of 'universal family', society 'must protect its members and defend their rights, just as the individual owes a duty to [its] rights' (PR § 238 A). The universal recognition of their rights from the side of civil society is conditioned by the particular work individuals

provide for and in it. Through the mediation of their work they contribute to the 'universal resources' of society. It is only through the social mediation of his work that the member of civil society 'is assured of his livelihood, just as the universal resources are maintained and augmented by the income which he earns through his work' (PR § 199). Due to the loss of the recognition of universal freedom, the rabble's mentality consists in claiming a universal right to exist independently of the particular duty to work that is normally tied to this right. It is clear, then, that the formation of a rabble corresponds to the 'dissolution' of the principle of mediation through work on which civil society as a whole is justified as a sphere of right. This is true both for the 'poor' and the 'rich' rabble. The precarious conditions in which 'poor' people live do not allow them to sustain themselves through their work, whereas 'rich' people have sufficient resources to live without participating in the labour process of society, as in the case of the rentier.¹¹ The two extremes of civil society, the 'poor' and the 'rich', who compose the rabble, are claiming rights without assuming their duty of 'supporting oneself by one's own activity and work' (PR § 244).

The rabble as resisting the concept of right

The 'ethical corruption' of which civil society affords a spectacle represents a danger that not only threatens the specific institutional sphere of right of civil society but also the concept of right Hegel tries to systematize more generally. For him, the general notion of right is an embodied form of freedom that spirit has produced as a 'second nature' (PR § 4). This implies that exercising my individual rights is always strictly tied to fulfilling, in return, some duties towards others: as my freedom is embodied in the world of objective spirit, the right I am exercising necessarily has to take into account the rights of others in the duties I have towards them.¹² 'No rights without duties, and vice-versa no duties without rights' is one of Hegel's leading mottos in his *Philosophy of Right* (see e.g. PR §§ 155, 261; EPS § 486). When claiming a right that is decoupled from any duty whatsoever, the rabble ends up 'dissolving' the fundamental principle of reciprocity between rights and duties.¹³ This is what makes the phenomenon of the rabble similar – albeit not identical – to the 'state of nature'. The rabble is similar to the 'state of nature' in that it claims a pure right while refusing, at the same time, to fulfil any duties in return (such as the duty to work to earn a livelihood). Yet the rabble is not as such identical to the 'state of nature'. For instead of implying a situation of violence and complete non-right, it simply

shows some 'remnants of the state of nature'. After all, 'the conscience of the absence of right' which characterizes its subjective disposition only occurs, as we have seen, 'under the precondition of right', that is in the spiritualized world of civil society as constituting a sphere of right. In other words, the rabble is the symptom for the 'remnants of the state of nature' within the 'second nature' produced by spirit. The 'generation' of the rabble appears thus as the exact countertendency to spirit's production of the 'system of right' as 'the realm of actualized freedom' (PR § 4).

Hegel remarks that the question of the rabble 'is one which agitates and torments modern societies especially' (PR § 244 A). This remark can be extended to his overall systematic approach of the concept of right. In addition to modern societies, the rabble also 'agitates and torments' Hegel's own speculative discourse in the way it puts the systematic concept of right that lies at the very core of it into crisis. The phenomenon of the rabble appears as one of the rare issues in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* that exceeds and also somehow resists its systematic discourse. The question, then, is to know how exactly this systematic discourse relates to an actually occurring phenomenon – the rabble – that resists Hegel's attempt to build up a philosophically consistent concept of right from within. In order to tackle this crucial question, we need to consider more generally how Hegel's speculative discourse faces its apparent other, namely contingency, in its attempts to establish a form of rational necessity through a dialectical process. In his *Logic*, Hegel opposes the category of necessity (as something that must be) to the category of contingency (as something that can or cannot be), while showing at the same time that contingency is a necessary but also limited moment of the process of reason's self-actualization. Moreover, he implicitly makes a distinction between two kinds of contingency with which the rational discourse of philosophy is confronted: 'relative contingency' and 'absolute contingency'.¹⁴ The former kind of contingency constitutes but a limited moment of the process of *Aufhebung* by way of which philosophical discourse ultimately demonstrates its rational necessity, the latter kind of contingency seems on the contrary to resist any dialectical process of sublation.

From the logical perspective adopted by Hegel throughout his *Philosophy of Right*, it is for instance 'relatively contingent' which person I love as long as we marry in the institution of the family; which particular state I was born in as long as the state guarantees in its constitution the basic rights of its citizens; or which professional career I endorse as long as my work responds to certain social needs of other members of civil society. Far from abstractly denying such contingencies that result from the finite and particular character of feelings, natural birth or arbitrary will (*Willkür*), the rational discourse of philosophy shows how those

contingencies actually fit into the rational system of ethical life (the family, the state's constitution, the system of needs) as 'the realm of actualized freedom' (PR § 4). While relativizing and limiting their finitude through a dialectical process of *Aufhebung*, 'it is reason itself which recognizes that contingency, contradiction, and semblance have their (*albeit limited*) sphere and right' (PR § 214 R). Facing 'relative contingency', 'philosophy and the concept overcome the point of view of mere contingency and recognize it as a *semblance* (*Schein*) whose essence is necessity' (PR § 324 R).

As the exact reverse of 'relative contingency', 'absolute contingency', on the other hand, designates a resistance to the dialectical process of overcoming finitude and relativity into the self-actualization of reason. An 'absolutely contingent' phenomenon remains stuck within its own finitude and particularity. It is for instance 'absolutely contingent' whether or not the phenomenon of the rabble will be 'generated' under certain social and economic conditions. The 'generation' of a rabble ultimately depends upon the way 'a large mass of people' *subjectively* relate to those social and economic conditions. Besides, the rabble's subjective disposition resists its complete integration into the set of ethical attitudes that the members of civil society normally share with one another. Still, the 'absolutely contingent' phenomenon of the rabble does not lie totally outside the rational discourse of the *Philosophy of Right*, but rather stands in what we could call an in-between position. By camping at the very frontier between non-right and right, between the 'state of nature' and its 'remnants' in civil society, the rabble is at the same time located in the in-between of philosophy and non-philosophy. Neither a total outsider to the philosophical system of right (the rabble is not a purely absurd and irrational phenomenon) nor a complete insider (the rabble does not become relativized through a dialectical process of sublation), the rabble could be apprehended – using Hegel's own terms to define the logical category of contingency – as an 'absolute restlessness' (*absolute Unruhe*, SL 545) that continues to 'agitate and torment' from within the rational necessity of philosophical discourse. Referring to a notion introduced by Lacan in order to describe the mechanisms of the Unconscious,¹⁵ one could say that the rabble is the 'extimacy' of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Neither insider nor outsider, the rabble is an 'absolutely contingent' phenomenon in that it blurs the very difference between what is inside and what lies outside the philosophical concept of right.

The rabble's logical status of 'absolute contingency' helps us understand why the solutions civil society tries to provide to this 'agitating and tormenting' question are condemned to fail. Modern civil society can at best 'prevent a

rabble from emerging' (PR § 240 A), but cannot as such eradicate its own inner tendency towards 'ethical corruption'. Charity and philanthropy (which rest on the 'goodwill' of the generous donators), police measures in regulating the market and providing social aid (which are but temporary measures that remain superficial), membership in corporations (which presupposes people are already socially integrated through work) and the extension of the market by way of colonization (which only postpones the problem), none of these solutions Hegel discusses in passing put an end to the threat of an emerging rabble.¹⁶ Police and corporations are but 'provisions [*Vorsorge*] against the contingency which remains present' in civil society (PR § 188). The rabble is an 'absolutely contingent' phenomenon that still 'remains present' (*die zurückbleibende Zufälligkeit*) in modern bourgeois societies, whose only alternative after abandoning any idea of abolishing it is then to prevent and contain its danger by taking 'care' (*Besorgung*) (PR § 188) of those who might one day be a part of its 'ethical dissolution'.

Does the rabble have a right of resistance?

The question, raised by various commentators,¹⁷ is then to know whether the rabble has any legitimate right to resist the situation in which it has been put by civil society. My contention here is that such a question is simply falsely formulated. Let us first remark that any classical notion of a right of resistance would be hard to find in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. In the classical sense, John Locke developed in his *Second Treatise of Government*, the right of resistance results from the social contract that has been established between those who govern and those who are governed in order to guarantee, within the institution of a civil society, the basic rights of the citizens, which include property rights, liberty and the right to welfare. When the fundamental terms of the contract are not correctly followed from the side of the government, the citizens have a right to resist the abuse of power from which they are suffering by rising against the existing government. In the last chapter of the *Second Treatise*, as he discusses the several causes leading to the 'dissolution of the government', Locke maintains that citizens regain their natural right to disobedience as soon as there is a 'breach of trust', which consists 'in not preserving the Form of Government [that had] been agreed on, and in not intending the end of Government itself, which is the publick good and preservation of Property'.¹⁸ Reluctant to embrace the idea of society or the state being founded on a contract (PR § 75 R), Hegel seems to altogether omit from the systematic framework of his *Philosophy of Right* a

right of resistance in the classical Lockean sense. Neither civil society nor the state is ultimately based on a contract through which the contractual partners would have willingly agreed on some basic normative principles. Civil society and the state are rather founded on the principle of reciprocity between rights and duties that is at work in 'the realm of actualized freedom', that is, in those concrete social practices and institutions in which members of civil society and the state participate. Moreover, while in Locke revolting citizens return to a 'state of nature' by regaining their natural rights, Hegel claims that such a return to the 'state of nature', even in the case of an emerging rabble, is impossible in the sphere of civil society, which only shows some 'remnants' of this state. Because he rejects any idea of a social contract and considers the return to a 'state of nature' as highly problematic, Hegel does not provide any philosophical arguments in favour of a right to resistance, at least not in the classical Lockean sense.

Yet in the 'morality' section of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel envisages a 'right of necessity' (*Notrecht*) that occurs in situations where the right of a person to live is put into 'extreme danger' by the property rights of some other person (PR § 127). In such emergency cases, a person has the moral right to save his life, even if by doing so he infringes someone else's property right (e.g., by stealing food). As Hegel argues, 'If someone whose life is in danger were not allowed to take measures to save himself, he would be destined to forfeit all his rights; and since he would be deprived of life, his entire freedom would be negated' (PR § 127 A). Still, the moral right of distress as discussed by Hegel is restrained in time (it is limited to a present situation) and in extension (it only concerns primary needs). As such, it does not apply to the rabble. Hegel makes this point clear in a passage of his Berlin lectures: 'Earlier we considered the right of distress as something referring to a momentary need. Here distress no longer has merely this momentary character. In the emergence of poverty, the power of particularity comes into existence in opposition to the reality of freedom' (PR 453–4). Whereas the right of necessity is morally justified only within the limits of a temporary situation of need, the phenomenon of the rabble refers to a situation that has the tendency to become endemic among modern bourgeois societies. If the rabble, as a rampant phenomenon that spreads across society, would be justified in exercising its moral right of necessity, this would involve the right to 'dissolve' civil society as a whole. By recognizing such a moral right, the 'power of particularity' would then be legitimated in its 'opposition to the reality of freedom'. In this respect, Hegel seems to be far closer to Kant, who also argued that admitting a right to revolt from a legal or moral standpoint would result in 'an act of suicide by the state'.¹⁹

Should that lead us to the conclusion that Hegel leaves absolutely no room for any form of resistance? Not necessarily. If we pay attention to what happens at the margins of the *Philosophy of Right*, it is possible to discover, despite Hegel's explicit refusal to found a right of resistance on the basis of a social contract or a moral claim, a highly paradoxical right of resistance. It is paradoxical in that it is attached not so much to a subject (be it a juridical or a moral subject) but rather to a social and historical phenomenon, that of the emerging rabble. In some noteworthy passages of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel echoes aspects of Locke's description of the 'dissolution of the government' as he characterizes the rabble's mentality in terms of 'the negative viewpoint in general': 'it is characteristic of the rabble, and of the negative viewpoint in general, to assume ill will, or less good will, on the part of the government' (PR § 301 R). The rabble's overall mistrust towards any form of government Hegel points out in this passage is comparable with the 'breach of trust' mentioned by Locke under the premises of his social contract theory. In both cases, mistrust brings about the 'dissolution' of 'civil society' (Hegel) and of 'the government' (Locke). The crucial difference between Hegel and Locke with regard to their depiction of the 'dissolution' of society lies in the fact that Hegel shows more philosophical concern for the concrete historical conditions behind 'the negative viewpoint' of the rabble. For Locke, a 'breach of trust' is always potentially present because of the arbitrary wills of the contractual partners on which civil society is founded. Since it is based on the agreement of the citizens, the social contract can be terminated at any time in one way or another by those who first agreed on it. Hegel's position is more nuanced, as he considers at least two options. It may be that 'the negative viewpoint in general' only refers to the merely subjective disposition of those who 'assume ill will, or less good will, on the part of the government'. But it may also be that the emerging rabble's mentality corresponds with a major shift within the existing set of social practices and institutions that constitute ethical life at a particular point in time. In such cases, 'the negative viewpoint in general' loses its purely abstract (or subjective) character, because it relates to a process of historical change in the actual ethical world.

In a peculiar passage of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel seems to depict the revolutionary process by which the 'negative viewpoint in general' turns into a 'substantial' opposition that is not reducible to a 'mere semblance' (*Schein*). He writes: 'If this opposition does make its appearance, and if it is not just superficial but actually takes on a substantial character, the state is close to destruction (*der Staat ist in seinem Untergang begriffen*)' (PR § 302 R). Unlike Locke, whose contractualist premises make him blind to such a distinction, Hegel proposes to differentiate a 'fake' from a 'real' revolution, depending on the historical

circumstances in which the rabble's 'negative viewpoint' emerges. In a 'fake' revolution, the opposition that appears within the state turns out to be reducible in the end to a 'mere semblance'. The sentiment of 'inward rebellion against the rich, against society, the government' (PR § 244 A) can easily be sublated in the existing set of social practices and institutions, as it does not correspond to any structural change in the ethical world. In a 'real' revolution, on the other hand, the opposition gains 'a substantial character' in that the rabble's mentality comes to reflect a historical stage at which 'the state is close to destruction'. Even though Hegel remains rather vague on this matter, it is highly plausible to suppose that the extreme polarization of civil society between a 'poor' and a 'rich' rabble is one – if not *the* – paradigmatic example of a 'substantial opposition' in the state which leads to its own self-destruction.²⁰

From a Hegelian perspective, the question whether a right of resistance of the rabble should be recognized as legitimate on a priori legal or moral grounds turns out to be simply senseless. As soon as the phenomenon of the rabble changes into a revolutionary process in which 'the state is close to destruction', the philosophically abstract *de jure* question concerning the legitimacy of resistance is already *de facto* answered. Paraphrasing Kant, one could argue that the question about the legitimacy of the state committing suicide becomes absurd inasmuch as historical events plainly show how in revolutionary situations states *do* – in some metaphorical sense – commit 'an act of suicide'. If a right of resistance is to be found at all philosophically 'justified' (*rechtfertigt*) in Hegel, it is neither on the level of 'abstract right' nor on that of 'morality' but rather on the level of history which has an 'absolute right in an unlimited sense' (PR § 30 R). When Hegel famously affirms that 'world history' is 'the world's court of judgment' (PR § 340), he means that it is only the course of history, and not some a priori legal or moral judgement, that can decide afterward which bundle of phenomena have taken the shape of a 'real' revolution. No philosophical discourse about abstract rights and subjective morality can judge in advance which social and political events will retroactively be 'justified' before the court of history. The task (and thus also the very limit) of the philosophy of right consists, then, in 'painting its grey on grey' (PR 23) after history has come to court to pronounce its judgement. It is for history, not legal or moral philosophy, to decide whether or not the rabble is 'justified' in its revolt against a state that is already crumbling. The profound ambivalence and 'extimacy' of the phenomenon of the rabble, its in-between situation between right and non-right is precisely that on which 'world history' ultimately judges. The 'extimacy' of the rabble rejoins the margins of the *Philosophy of Right* at its

frontier with 'world history'. History as a whole, for Hegel, consists in the act of permanently escaping from the 'state of nature' into 'the realm of actualized freedom', and the rabble, insofar as it relates to a 'real', ongoing revolutionary process, is but a highly symptomatic phenomenon of this permanent transition. Assuming that this paradoxical way of looking at the right of resistance within Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* contains a grain of truth, we might conclude: (1) that the right of resistance is attached to the rabble insofar as it is a historical transitional phenomenon, and not a juridical, moral, or even ethical subject, and (2) that the rabble receives such a right as a historical phenomenon at the margins of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, there where juridical, moral or ethical rights become relativized in front of the world court of history.

The rabble and the proletariat: Same fight, different philosophy?

Frank Ruda has recently argued that the rabble names the point in Hegel at which politics 'irrupts' into philosophy: 'the name "rabble" stands for an indeterminacy about which philosophy does not have to say anything except that it presents the negation of all determinations. ... For this indeterminacy appearing within philosophy is the indeterminacy of an emergence, of an event of which philosophy previously cannot say anything'.²¹ While trying to dialectically sublate it into the systematic framework of his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel has shown a desperate attempt to immunize philosophical discourse from the threatening exteriority of the rabble, the rabble being 'a limitation of [Hegel's] "political philosophy" of the state'.²² According to Ruda, the 'irruption of politics into philosophy' is the major issue at stake in the infamous transition from Hegel to Marx. With his project of transforming philosophy under the premises of a radical egalitarian politics promoted by the proletariat, Marx was able to save the rabble from the mere indeterminacy to which Hegel's 'political philosophy' had condemned it. In conclusion, I would like to contest this interpretation by stressing the strength rather than the weakness of Hegel's philosophical position towards the rabble in comparison with Marx's programme of realizing philosophy through the revolutionary actions of the proletariat.

In his 1844 *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, the young Marx presented the proletariat as the class whose 'universal suffering' will sooner or later bring about the dissolution of any class-structured society. The dissolution of modern class society through the proletarian revolution is supposed to go

hand in hand with the 'abolition-and-actualization' of philosophy *and* of the proletariat: 'Philosophy cannot be actualized without the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot be abolished without the actualization [*Verwirklichung*] of philosophy.'²³ The only way to really achieve the universal theoretical discourse of philosophy is to go through the revolutionary practice of the proletariat as being the universal class within society. It is clear that the young Marx and the old Hegel carried out two opposite strategies in the way they handle the proletariat and the rabble. Marx's proletariat and Hegel's rabble represent two types of 'negativity' at work within modern civil society. They both have the potential to dissolve the societies that produce them from the inside. But whereas the young Marx saw the universal class of the proletariat as a necessary moment in the larger process of human emancipation, Hegel perceived in the phenomenon of the rabble a moment of 'absolute restlessness' whose fate will continue to 'agitate and torment' both the existing ethical world and speculative philosophy. Unlike the approach of the old Hegel, who left the phenomenon of the rabble as a moment of resistance within his systematic discourse, the young Marx attempted to unite the 'heart' (the proletariat) and the 'head' (philosophy), the practical and the theoretical sides of human emancipation. In suppressing any difference between what is inside and what is outside philosophy, the process of abolishing and actualizing philosophical discourse through the revolutionary subject of the proletariat tends to 'metabolize' once and for all the very 'extimacy' of the phenomenon Hegel called the 'rabble'.

Certainly, Marx's theoretical achievement consists in having searched for the social and economic mechanisms that might be able to explain the extreme polarization of modern societies in terms of 'class struggles'. It is no wonder, therefore, that Marx started his lifelong project of a 'critique of political economy' with a critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* by showing the latter's insufficiency in tackling this problem. However, this enterprise ended up in locating the 'negativity' of modern society within the specific subject of the proletariat. Hegel, by contrast, while giving no determinate explanation for the phenomenon of the rabble, left open the 'absolutely contingent' process of an emerging rabble whose revolutionary character could only be judged retrospectively in the course of history. In doing so, Hegel maintains a profound heterogeneity of the 'philosophical point of view' (PR § 301 R) and 'the point of view of the rabble' (PR § 272 R), a separation Marx wished to overcome through the 'abolition-and-actualization' of philosophy and of the proletariat. Strangely enough, it may be that Hegel's absolute idealism as 'the only philosophical theory that *knows of the concept of absolute contingency*'²⁴ reveals itself to be much more materialist than

Marx's own historical materialism, at least if 'materialism' is defined – in contrast with the 'idealism' that confounds, as the young Marx would put it, the 'logic of fact' with the 'fact of the logic' – as a philosophical position that recognizes the right of non-philosophy to permanently resist its rational discourse, instead of trying to abolish their difference.²⁵ This is the political as well as philosophical choice Hegel and Marx confront us with: to either continually articulate the difference between philosophy and non-philosophy, between non-politics and politics, between practice and theory, or to abolish it once and for all.

Notes

- 1 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xxi.
- 2 See J.C. Bourdin, 'Hegel et la "question sociale": société civile, vie et détresse', *Revue Germanique Internationale* 15 (2001): 145–76; Y. Melamed, 'Leaving the Wound Visible. Hegel and Marx on the Rabble and the Problem of Poverty in Modern Society', *The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (2001): 23–39; Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble. An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (London: Continuum Press, 2011); Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing. Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012).
- 3 Adrian Johnston, 'Review of Frank Ruda's *Hegel's Rabble*', *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (June 2012), available online: <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/31707-hegel-s-rabble-an-investigation-into-hegel-s-philosophy-of-right/>
- 4 Literature, old and new, on the topic of the rabble in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* includes S. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, 147–54); J.P. Lefebvre and P. Macherey, *Hegel et la société* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984); A. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 247–55; M.O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy. The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 236–50; J. Anderson, 'Hegel's Implicit View on How to Solve the Problem of Poverty: The Responsible Consumer and the Return of the Ethical to Civil Society', in *Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism. Studies in Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. R. Williams (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 185–205; Bourdin, 'Hegel et la "question sociale"'; and Melamed, 'Leaving the Wound Visible'. Most of these commentators, however, discuss the rabble in close relation to the issue of poverty, whereas – as Ruda has convincingly shown in *Hegel's Rabble* – the rabble in Hegel is not reducible to the so-called 'social

question'. Ruda's investigation remains until now the most complete on the subject.

- 5 G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts. Berlin 1819/1820. Nachgeschrieben von J.R. Ringier*, ed. E. Angehrn, M. Bondeli and H.N. Seelmann (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 2000), 222.
- 6 See Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 49–57.
- 7 See, for example, the 1819/1820 Berlin lectures, where Hegel speaks of the 'cleavage' (*Zwiespalt*) in which the rabble finds itself (146).
- 8 G.W.F. Hegel, *Die Philosophie des Rechts. Vorlesung von 1821/22*, ed. H. Poppe (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005), 223.
- 9 As he understands the 'un-right' (*Un-recht*) of the rabble as being 'beyond right and wrong' (*Hegel's Rabble*, 134), Frank Ruda seems to suggest such a return to the 'state of nature'. Against Ruda's 'Nietzschean' interpretation, I'm arguing here that the profoundly ambivalent phenomenon of the rabble is located not *beyond* but *between* right and non-right.
- 10 See Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 254–5.
- 11 Hegel, *Die Philosophie des Rechts. Vorlesung von 1821/22*, 222.
- 12 See M.G. Kowalski, 'Substantial Freedom as Identity of Rights and Duties', in *Identity and Difference. Studies in Hegel's Logic, Philosophy of Spirit, and Politics*, ed. P. T. Grier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 253–76.
- 13 See Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 124–35.
- 14 I'm borrowing this distinction from J.C. Pinson, *Hegel, le droit et le libéralisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), 20–5. To Pinson, 'relative' and 'absolute' contingency refer to the way contingency is discussed respectively in the doctrine of essence and in the doctrine of concept. On Hegel and contingency, see also Dieter Henrich's seminal essay, 'Hegels Theorie über den Zufall', in *Hegel im Kontext* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 158–87.
- 15 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire VII. L'éthique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1986).
- 16 For a more 'optimistic' view on how Hegel resolves the problem of the rabble, see Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, and Anderson, 'Hegel's Implicit View on How to Solve the Problem of Poverty'. Hardimon interprets Hegel as having contended that 'although poverty does represent an extremely serious flaw, the *basic* features of the modern social world (i.e., the central social institutions) are nonetheless good' (249).
- 17 See especially Henrich, 'Vernunft in Verwirklichung', in *Hegel. Philosophie des Rechts. Die Vorlesung von 1819/20* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983), 20–3 and Melamed, 'Leaving the Wound Visible', 31–2.
- 18 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 424.

- 19 Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss and trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 146.
- 20 During the French Revolution a diagnose similar to Hegel's (that extreme polarization leads to the state's self-destruction) was made by Marat in his journal *L'Ami du Peuple*: 'Un Etat est bien près de sa ruine, toutes les fois qu'on y voit l'extrême indigence assise à côté de l'extrême opulence' (*L'Ami du peuple*, 10 August 1793).
- 21 Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 177–8.
- 22 Ibid., 167.
- 23 Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, ed. J. O'Malley and trans. A. Jolin and J. O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 142.
- 24 Henrich, 'Hegels Theorie über den Zufall', 160.
- 25 As an old Hegelian post-Marxist recently noted with regard to the rabble, 'In asserting the threat of "abstract negativity" to the existing order as a permanent feature which can never be *aufgehoben*, Hegel is here more materialist than Marx' (Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 452–3).

Afterword: Antinomies of Resistance

Rebecca Comay

There's an antinomy implicit in the word itself: resistance signals both impediment and impetus. It can either disrupt or sustain the equilibrium and steadiness of every state of affairs and setup: it can be either a force of transformation or a bulwark against innovation – either conservative or transformative, and at times, disconcertingly, simultaneously both at once. Resistance shares many of the semantic tensions of its cognate, *stasis*, with its contradictory senses of immobility and upheaval. *Stasis*, in Greek, has the ambiguity pertaining to all things 'standing' (both *resistance* and *stasis* derive from *histemi*, from which the Latin, *stare, sistere*, from which also, eventually, *existere*, to step out into being, to stand forth, to exist), a verb that pivots on the grammatical tension between stative and dynamic, between the condition of standing and the act of standing up, between situation and event – steadfastness, constancy, and stability, on the one hand; interruption, instigation, initiation, on the other. *Stasis* points to that which is stationary, static, persists, which stands up over time, which withstands the corrosive and erosive forces of antagonism and entropy, which is consecrated to status, consistency and standing, for example, the installation of a statue, the establishment of an institution, constitution, legal statute or sovereign state. The state, like every institution, is tautologically committed to sustaining its own status and stability. But *stasis* also gestures to that which insists, takes a stand, stands apart or against, that which stands up to and rises up against the existing state of affairs, that which defies the status quo, desists from consensus, dismantles statues and institutions, disrupts laws and constitutions, introduces dissent, division, discord into the stable order of the state itself. *Stasis* means steadiness, constancy, permanence – and it also means sedition, faction, rebellion, civil war.

There is thus an internal dissensus or *stasis* in the very meaning of *stasis*. Nicole Loraux, who has done more than anyone to explore this antinomy,

speaks of a *Gegensinn*, alluding to those 'primal words' that Freud loved to draw on when demonstrating the imperviousness of the unconscious to the law of noncontradiction ('the unconscious knows no negation').¹ Barbara Cassin finds the word 'Freudian-Hegelian', which immediately raises the stakes. It joins the family of those special words Hegel delighted to stumble on in his own mother tongue (words like *Aufhebung*, notably, with its antithetical and even irreconcilable range of meanings), and that he took as evidence of the pulsating negativity of thought (and being).² It of course requires speculative genius and a lifetime of hard philosophical labour to interpret (even to notice) such an accident. The word itself is a stumbling block and point of resistance to understanding: it marks the site where the highest achievement of reason converges with the most unthinking idiocy of the unconscious.

Stasis forces us to reconsider the opposition of motion and rest. It puts the very antithesis of stasis and kinesis into question. Too much stability can be destabilizing, while excessive mobility produces deadlock. In a medical register, stasis refers to digestive sluggishness, circulatory constriction, gastric blockage, constipation, the toxic coagulation or clogging of bodily humours, a stagnation that will eventually throw the whole organism into crisis. In a political register, stasis is a kind of hardening or rigidity that can precipitate upheaval precisely because in its obduracy, its one-sidedness, its refusal to adapt to circumstances, to go with the flow, it exposes the rigid armature sustaining the status quo, provoking violent counter-reactions that in turn force latent antagonisms to the surface. We are *in a state* when our confinement, our stuckness, becomes explosive.

Conversely, too much agitation can be immobilizing. The sixth-century poet Alcaeus speaks of a stasis of the winds, as when a ship – a sailing vessel, a ship of state – is caught between countervailing gusts, buffeted from one side to another, marooned in constant motion, as if becalmed. We are *at sea* when too much turbulence becomes constricting – when we become immobilized by internal conflict or trapped in the ceaseless vortex of opposing forces. This also happens in a political register when protracted conflict produces oppositional gridlock – the stalemate of prolonged civil war, the repetitive circle of revenge, the collapse of time and history into an endless cycling of provocation and reprisal. This historical paralysis can leave as its legacy yet another blockage. The future dissipates before the traumatic persistence of a past that will not pass but lingers on as a stony impediment arresting both thought and action.

This is why *stasis*, for the Greeks – the civil war at Athens, for example, when the unified city found itself convulsed by internal dissension (at once paralysed by strife and spinning out of control: simultaneously agitated and frozen) – why *stasis* poses such a problem for the reestablishment of order and the return to history. It also poses a fundamental crisis for the archive and for the memory politics that underwrites this. Nothing short of enforced amnesia, an indelibly inscribed erasure, could break the traumatic hold of the past and suspend the deadlock of inter- and transgenerational violence. This amnesia sometimes takes a paradoxical form: legally mandated oblivion, the paradoxical injunction not to remember, *me mnesikakein* – to take an oath of forgetting, to commit oneself not to remember, to *remember not to remember*, or more precisely, *to remember to not remember*. ‘Let the memory of these things remain extinguished and dormant *as something that has not occurred*.’ Thus the official oblivion decreed by the law of amnesty of 403 BCE, which would be the blueprint for so many subsequent amnesties, from the Edict of Nantes through the Treaty of Westphalia to the postwar legislation in France forbidding the prosecution, or even the naming, of collaborators in the Vichy regime. But resistance can also inspire unofficial acts of forgetting. The finest monument to the Commune turned out to be a colossal snowman.

‘Resistance’ is a kind of ‘primal word’ in just this sense. The chapters in this collection establish without a doubt that the term should be officially admitted to the Hegelian lexicon – not because it is so robust but precisely because it is such a slippery, fragile concept. This is not idle word play, and whatever Hegel says, you don’t even have to be a German speaker to enjoy the speculative ambivalence of the word or concept. Nowhere is this ambivalence more evident than where the political stakes of Hegel’s enterprise come into question, as they invariably always do. An oppositional and repetitive stance and standing (there’s an ‘again’ lurking in every ‘against’, just as there’s a *Wieder* spilling out of every *Wider*), resistance undermines any clear distinction between persistence and insistence. Resistance points at once to a kind of conservatism – a reluctance, inertia, and even paralysis – and to a restlessness that needs to push every situation to breaking point and to leave nothing standing. And it points also to an even more startling conundrum: motion can mask stasis and immobility can explode. This is why the interminable quarrel between ‘mobilitist’ and ‘eternalist’ readings of Hegel – these usually (but do not always or obviously) map on to the opposition between ‘left-wing’ versus ‘right-wing’ orthodoxies – can get so easily derailed.

The point is not that resistance is ideologically amorphous or that it inherently lacks political motivation, as is often charged. But there is a fundamental instability in the concept that makes it both intriguing and awkward as a political resource. Although it is often tempting to think of resistance as a splendid thing – defiant, courageous, on the side of liberty and justice – it can be sobering to recall that its earliest expressions tilted decidedly towards the right. Everybody wants to claim it – and everyone needs to deflate it. It has become a little routine to disparage resistance, to doubt its efficacy, or to deplore its reactive and even reactionary aspects (this deflationary project can sometimes be an exercise in Schadenfreude). A cursory reading of Adorno, Foucault, Agamben, Arendt, Hardt/Negri or Žižek might suggest that resistance is futile, that it is co-opted in advance, that it is toxically contaminated by what it opposes: it is a by-product and accomplice of power; it has been snuffed out by the forces of total domination, ensnared in the web of administration, devoured by Empire or absorbed like oil in the machinery of global capitalism. The gist of these arguments (the details are of course diverse) is that hegemonic power not only accommodates and tolerates but even demands resistance. ‘Where there is power there is resistance . . .’ Every regime not only tolerates but even requires for its own maintenance a reserve of thuggish negativity to absorb or overcome: capitalism’s need for crisis; liberal democracy’s need for (at least a show of) contestation in order to prove the resilience of the system; the ‘totalitarian’ need for a steady supply of dissidents that it can demonstrably suppress by a show of force.

Resistance thus seems to be parasitical on what it opposes. It is caught up in the repetitive cycle of action and reaction – the circle of reciprocal solicitation described by Hegel in the third chapter of the *Phenomenology* and elaborated in his exposition of reflexive determinations in the *Logic* – the reciprocal binary logic of inside and outside, position and opposition, thesis and antithesis. Or, to speak in a Lacanian-Nietzschean register, resistance is frozen in the imaginary. Mesmerized by its antithesis, it is ensnared in the coils of mimetic rivalry and *ressentiment*. In its desire to challenge existing conditions, but without the means or will to overcome these, resistance is committed to reproducing these conditions, borrowing its energy, tactics, and even objectives from extant social models. Either every image of the future is forged in the crucible of the present (the standard Marxist argument against utopian socialism, a variation on Hegel’s critique of the *Sollen*), or there can be no vision of the future, not even the aspiration to have one, because every future will have collapsed into the orbit of the present and serves only to eternalize this present. Resistance,

as its suffix suggests – intransitive, uninflected, sheer participial endurance – is always on the verge of becoming autotelic, self-fulfilling, dedicated to its own perpetuation.

This is precisely Hegel's critique of abstract negation: surprisingly, the problem turns out to be not that it's too radical or nihilistic, that it lacks a positive agenda,³ but rather that it's actually reactionary. Like all scepticism of the less-than-thoroughgoing kind, it invests everything in its own powers of contestation, conveniently obscuring its own unwavering commitment to the status quo.⁴ In short, the negativity of resistance is either too determinate or too abstract. More painfully yet, its own determinacy can prove to be the ultimate abstraction: by collapsing into the endless reversibility of opposition and antithesis, dialectic keeps succumbing to the slave logic of reactivity and revolt.

This ambiguity produces the discomfort that so often arises when emancipatory political projects (feminism or anti-colonialism, for example) come into contact with psychoanalysis: a disruptive and even revolutionary concept of resistance as a practice of insubordination confronts a seemingly regressive and repressive concept of resistance as a technique of self-subjugation. Resistance can be either a struggle against or a collusion with domination: either a challenge to oppression or an instrument of repression. It can be either a pressure to change or a stubborn investment in not doing so. At times, irritatingly, it can seem to be both at once – simultaneously the opening and the greatest obstacle to transformation. Hegel does not protect himself from this ambiguity, which is why the endless oscillation between 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' interpretations of Hegel can sometimes have the appearance of a Kantian antinomy – an eternal (and ultimately ahistorical) contest between the twin poles of 'one-sided' abstraction: reaction or revolution, stability or movement, eternity or time. One must forever resist the temptation to fetishize this impasse.

Notes

- 1 Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006), esp. 104–8; Loraux, 'Cratylus et l'épreuve de l'étymologie', *Revue de philosophie ancienne* 5 (1987): 49–69. Compare Freud, 'On the Antithetical Sense of Primal Words', in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey,

24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 11:154–61; and see also ‘The Unconscious,’ *Standard Edition*, 19:235–39.

- 2 Barbara Cassin, ‘Politics of Memory: On Treatments of Hate,’ *The Public* 8, no. 3 (2001): 9–22; compare Hegel on the pleasures of speculative polysemy in SL 106–7.
- 3 Thus the inevitable buckle in the face of the embarrassing question of consequences. This is precisely the question that stymied Enlightenment: ‘*What next? What is the truth Enlightenment has propagated in their stead?*’ (PS 340).
- 4 Thus the compliance built into every incomplete versions of scepticism: all it can do is ‘wait and see’ what will come next so it can ‘throw it too into the same empty abyss’ (PS 51).

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